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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 188

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 18 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Tourism

1. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate for the current year of the value of tourism to Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): In 1989, the last year for which complete figures are available, Wales's earnings from tourism were around £1,500 million—an increase of some 25 per cent. on the previous year. It has also been estimated that the industry provides some 95,000 jobs in the Principality, approximately 9 per cent. of the total. There are, of course, other benefits—including the protection and enhancement of our culture, environment, and heritage. The tourism industry is, therefore, of considerable importance to the Welsh economy.

Mr. Gregory: I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that the figures are most attractive, particularly bearing in mind the employment possibilities. Is the Wales tourist board co-operating with the private sector as much as possible to provide a true partnership between state and private sector? Bearing in mind the Gulf crisis, is the Wales tourist board doing everything possible to regain the confidence of overseas tourists and encouraging them to visit Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Wales tourist board collaborates closely with the private sector, and has the use of section 4 grants amounting to some £3·2 million this year. It uses part of that money to support its local enterprise and development programme, which is part of a wider strategy over five years which is expected to generate £73 million of investment and to create 2,000 jobs. The programme is on course to achieve that target. I confirm that the Wales tourist board is working closely with the British Tourist Authority in seeking to attract visitors to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Will the Minister join me in praising the cleanliness of the beaches of Gower, which the recently published National Rivers Authority report gives a clean bill of health in respect of last year's bathing season? In congratulating Swansea city council, the National Rivers Authority and everyone else on their efforts in ensuring the cleanliness of Gower beaches, can the Minister tell the people of Wales how he proposes to help them to pay the higher poll tax bills that bring that particular benefit?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Gower is a much-admired part of the country, and the hon. Gentleman is honoured to represent it. I am delighted to hear him sing the praises of Gower beaches. I would also praise the Llandudno beaches in my constituency. The proposals for bringing our beaches up to European standards of cleanliness fall within the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority and Welsh Water. The hon. Gentleman will know that the population of Wales are also most anxious that Welsh beaches should meet the highest standards, so they should be able to contribute towards achieving that.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is to visit Bodelwyddan castle on 29 March for a recording of "Any Questions?" Will my hon. Friend the Minister remind our right hon. Friend of the importance

of that cultural landmark and of the inadvisability of premature steps being taken by Clwyd county council which might put in jeopardy the viability of that enterprise?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I, too, have visited Bodelwyddan castle. It is indeed an attractive castle, with a superb exhibition of pictures from the national portrait gallery. It is the responsibility of the Labour-controlled Clwyd council and I understand that there has been some doubt about the future of the castle. It is a matter for that local authority to resolve.

Hospital Reorganisation

2. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority to discuss hospital reorganisation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): My right hon. Friend currently has no such plans.

Mr. Morgan: I take it from the hon. Member's comprehensive answer that he is aware of South Glamorgan district health authority's closure decisions, which were announced last week and were followed up by his visit to the Prince of Wales hospital in Rhydlafar in my constituency. Will he confirm that South Glamorgan district health authority has quietly dropped its plans for a third large district general hospital, without which none of the closure decisions announced last week makes any sense? Does he agree that it is putting the cart before the horse for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to confirm South Glamorgan's closure proposals? Will he agree to advise South Glamorgan district health authority to withdraw the six closure proposals that he has empowered it to carry out, as it no longer has the £70 million district general hospital—on which the whole plan depends?

Mr. Bennett: The first thing to be said is that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has spent all his time misleading his constituents about the reorganisation proposals. I wish to put on record categorically that his statements in the newspaper *Wales on Sunday* in the past few weeks are completely untrue. The important thing to recall is that moving the children's ward at Rhydlafar to the Cardiff royal infirmary where there will be proper district general hospital facilities available is an improvement for the children of South Glamorgan. It is appalling that the hon. Member has spent so much time maligning the district health authority and completely misrepresenting what is to happen. Any proposals by the district health authority for its new district general hospital will be considered when it proposes them, but nothing in the reorganisation proposals is predicated on the new hospital; they are all being proposed because they are good moves to improve the provision of health services in South Glamorgan. Most of the improvements will mean new hospitals as opposed to old buildings which have outlived their usefulness.

Training

3. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairmen of the training and enterprise councils in Wales to discuss the numbers of people requiring youth training places and the number of employment training places available in 1991-92.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I meet TEC chairman in Wales regularly and a few moments ago I was with Geoff Canning and Bob Hastie. My next formal meeting with all the TEC chairmen in Wales is on 7 May, when we shall discuss a wide range of issues, including the provision of training.

Mr. Rowlands: I hope that the Secretary of State had a good lunch. Did the chairman of Mid Glamorgan TEC tell the right hon. Gentleman that one of the major training organisations in Merthyr Tydfil is turning young people away at the moment because it has no places, and that it will have to turn away Easter and summer school leavers because there are no places? They will either have to go further afield for training or just wait until places occur. Were we not supposed to be encouraging young people to train rather than slamming the doors on them?

Mr. Hunt: The correct position is this. Total provision for training in Wales in 1991-92 is £151 million, after taking account of my recent announcement of an additional £8·41 million. That is slightly more than is likely to be spent this year and more than two thirds of that money will be directly available to training and enterprise councils in Wales to spend, which is more than they have to spend at the moment. However, it is up to the training and enterprise councils to settle their priorities.

Open-heart Operations

4. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has regarding the number of open-heart operations for adults that is needed to be carried out for people in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We are presently developing cardiac services in Wales to reflect the advice of the Royal College of Physicians that about 560 to 660 operations per million population are required for adults.

Mr. Wardell: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. His arithmetic will tell him straight away that, with a population of 2·5 million, Wales needs 1,200 adult open-heart operations every year, not the present abysmal figure of fewer than 700. As Wales has one of the highest rates of cardiac disease of any developed country in the world, will the Minister tell us when the promises that have been made since 1984 that the figure will be raised to 1,200 adult operations are to be kept, when the satellite unit which will perform 400 adult operations will be set up and where will it be sited?

Mr. Bennett: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes such a negative view of this important subject. *[Interruption.]* It is a pity that Labour Members do not want to hear the facts. In the current financial year, there have been 140 more operations. The hon. Gentleman should remember that in 1979 there were no such operations. We have recognised the need for a second cardiac centre to perform some 400 operations a year.

Consideration is now being given to where it should be sited: it will be somewhere to the west of Cardiff, but there are competing claims from Swansea, Bridgend and elsewhere. We shall ensure that an announcement is made as soon as a proper decision can be reached, which will mean staffing with good consultants.

The hon. Gentleman should also remember that the 1,200 operations to which he referred do not represent merely the total number of heart operations in Wales. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) should listen. His hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) has asked a serious question and I am giving a serious answer. The total number of operations will not be just the 1,200 in Wales— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is rather a long answer.

Mr. Bennett: With respect, Mr. Speaker, it was a rather complicated question.

Patients in north Wales who are now going to Merseyside and Manchester will continue to do so. The total for Wales will be more than 1,200, but some of the operations will be performed in English hospitals.

Mr. Rogers: Despite the grave danger of being subjected to yet another party political broadcast, may I ask whether the Minister is aware that many of the referrals for open-heart surgery are from chest clinics, especially those scattered throughout the valleys, where there is a good deal of residual ill health caused by mining? The chest clinics are still desperately needed, despite the substantial rundown of the mining industry that has taken place under the present Government.

In the light of that, what does the Minister think of Mid Glamorgan health authority's arbitrary decision to close the chest clinic in Pontypridd without any consultation with the community health council, Members of Parliament or anyone else who might have an interest? Given that 60 per cent. of patients at the Pontypridd chest clinic come from the Rhondda, I am very much alarmed by the methods adopted by the new type of health authority and the failure to consult anyone.

Mr. Bennett: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has not heard about this morning's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about improvements to the health service in the valleys. A further £5·65 million is to be provided and 13 more projects will be helped. All of that will help the people of the valleys to improve their health service.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the increase in unemployed 16 to 18-year-olds and males and females over 18 years has been since he last answered oral questions.

Mr. David Hunt: As the figures are collected quarterly, no new figures are yet available.

Mr. Powell: I hope that I shall be given the same latitude as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

Mr. Speaker: No—please.

Mr. Powell: As we do not have the figures, it is important that we get the facts right. I will give the Secretary of State my estimate. In my constituency, about 200 people will join the unemployment register as a result of the closure of CATO—Community Activities and Training in Ogmore. When the right hon. Gentleman meets the chairmen of the training and enterprise councils, as he has told my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) that he will, will he ask them to carry out an investigation of the financial circumstances of Mid Glamorgan TEC in particular? I understand that, among all the millions of pounds to which the Secretary of State has referred, about £1 million has gone astray in Mid Glamorgan TEC alone. That could have kept in operation the five agencies which have been made redundant since they were set up, and provided training for 400 or 500 trainees.

Mr. Hunt: I believe that the development of training and enterprise councils has been generally welcomed by the House. I also believe that they have sufficient resources. It is for the TECs to determine their financial and management decisions, including the selection of training providers. The TECs have made it clear that the contracts that are signed must satisfy the quality standards criteria. This is a matter for the training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Livsey: What advice would the Secretary of State give to one of my constituents, aged 18, who completed a two-year course and then discovered that he was applying with 81 others for a job? He failed to get it, although he was well qualified. Would the Secretary of State say to that young person, as was said to me when I was aged 18, that his only opportunity lies outside Wales?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman's question gives me a great opportunity to blow the Welsh Office's trumpet and say that 17 new industrial projects, involving investment of more than £63 million and creating more than 1,260 jobs, have been announced by me from this Dispatch Box in the past month. The opportunities available are increasing. A number of very large industrial concerns, including Toyota and Bosch, are recruiting staff. I am determined that the number of opportunities will increase.

Mr. Raffan: In view of the recent announcement of a total of 400 new jobs in north Wales—at W. A. Turner in Flint, Breger Gibson in Greenfield and Mita in St. Asaph—does my right hon. Friend agree that that demonstrates not only the underlying strength of the local economy in north Wales but the job opportunities for young people there?

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I am grateful to him for giving me this opportunity to demonstrate that all those announcements are positive proof that Wales, and particularly north Wales, continues to act as a magnet for industrial investment from both home and abroad. Some Opposition Members do not like good news, but this is very good news for Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: I congratulate the Department on any of its success stories, but they are being undermined by the current deep recession. Has the Secretary of State overlooked last week's loss in Pontypridd of 125 valuable electronics jobs? The Conservatives tell us that they have solved Wales's problems and engineered an economic

miracle, but do not the unemployment figures tell a different story? For example, has not unemployment in Neath increased by 12 per cent. during the last year? Was not the right hon. Gentleman's press statement in Neath this morning a grotesque travesty of the facts?

Mr. Hunt: I am a little mystified as to why the hon. Gentleman should mention Neath, of all places. I should hate to think that he was trying to make party political advantage out of the very serious challenge that faces Wales. Since 1979, there have been a large number of inward investment projects in Neath, creating 1,200 jobs. To rehearse what I said earlier, the medium to longer-term prospects for Wales are still as good as ever.

Overseas Companies

6. Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many inquiries the Welsh Office have answered during the current financial year from overseas companies interested in developing new manufacturing jobs in *(a)* Gwynedd and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I am delighted to be able to say that in the current financial year there have, to date, been 189 visits to Wales by potential inward investors. Increasing interest is being shown in investment in Gwynedd and, indeed, throughout Wales.

I am particularly delighted to be able to announce today that Euro/DPC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Los Angeles-based Diagnositc Projects Corporation, is to relocate to Gwynedd with an investment of nearly £10 million at Llanberis, which will create 200 jobs. I should like to thank the hon. Gentleman for his help in securing that marvellous inward investment project.

Mr. Wigley: I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and thank him for his positive commitment to the project. I also thank the Welsh Office, which rapily expedited these matters, the Welsh Development Agency and Gwynedd county council for the role that they played. In particular I thank Arfon borough council, whose ability to attract inward investment was exemplary. Does the Secretary of State agree that for a leading American company to have chosen Gwynedd as its European base for this major project gives the lie to those who say—*[Interruption.]*—that inward investment will not come to counties such as Gwynedd? Does he also agree that it is the prelude to a much happier future, with more industrial investment and more jobs?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It was outrageous of Labour Members to shout "Tory friend", as though this good news were bad news for the Labour party. In fact, it is indeed bad news for the Labour party. It gives a marvellous boost to the economy of north Wales and will further help to stem the tide of bright young Welsh men and women who, traditionally, have left the area to find opportunities elsewhere. An industry at the leading edge of technology has chosen to locate in an area where the Welsh language and traditions thrive. I am sure that that decision will be seen as a milestone in the economic development of Gwynedd.

Mr. Grist: Does my right hon. Friend agree that flat production and pay and earnings increases of 9 or 10 per cent. are bound to result in falling employment and to lessen the attractiveness of Wales to inward investors? As the cost of living has barely risen in the past six months, those rises are quite unnecessary to counter the rise in the cost of living.

Mr. Hunt: I agree that high wage rises are a disincentive. None the less, I am able to announce the creation of further jobs at Swansea enterprise park, where a Japanese company, Shimano UK, is establishing the European headquarters of its fishing equipment division. Another Japanese company, Aiwa UK, will invest nearly £4 million in extending operations at its factory near Crumlin in Gwent, and Therapeutic Antibodies Incorporated of Nashville, Tennessee is to establish a biological manufacturing facility in Dyfed, with financial support from the Welsh Office. I cannot hear cheers from Labour Members, but I can hear them from elsewhere in the House.

Mr. Barry Jones: Our inward investment record is very good, and the right hon. Gentleman's news on Gwynedd will help the county very much. Given last Thursday's news that unemployment last month was the highest since June 1981, does the Secretary of State accept that the Welsh economy is suffering from the same political incompetence, mismanagement and dithering that we saw from the right hon. Gentleman on the poll tax? Does he agree that we need a budget for investment, and is he aware that according to the latest available figures there has been a cut of almost 60 per cent. in full-time manufacturing jobs in the Neath and Port Talbot area in the past 10 years? The right hon. Gentleman's press release in Neath this morning was a travesty of the facts and he should be ashamed of it.

Mr. Hunt: I have a horrible feeling that the hon. Gentleman wrote that before he was aware of the contents of my announcement. Since our previous Welsh Question Time, I have been able to announce 17 projects supported by the Welsh Office involving investment of more than £63 million and creating more than 1,260 new jobs. I was delighted to give regional selective assistance of more than £10 million towards those new job opportunities. Although I greatly regret any increase in unemployment, that is why I say that the medium to longer-term prospects for Wales are still as good as ever and the Labour party should stop talking our country down.

NHS Resources

7. Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to provide additional resources to the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Planned expenditure has been increased to £1,719 million in 1991-92 which, with expected cost improvements and income generation schemes, will provide an increase of 13 per cent. over the original provision in this financial year. Additional resources will be made available for review bodies' pay awards.

Mr. Griffiths: Has a comparison been made between the rise in inflation in the health service and in inflation generally? How much extra money is required for the growing care of all our people? Does the Minister agree that, despite the welcome increases in funding, waiting lists in many areas are still increasing? Will he call in the capital

programme of Mid Glamorgan health authority to reconsider the need to develop phase 2 of the Princess of Wales hospital at Bridgend, as promised six years ago?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman should look at the figures. He will find that, between 1974 and 1979, there was a 9·3 per cent. increase in real terms. That has been far exceeded under the present Government, who have increased expenditure by 55·7 per cent. in real terms.

The hon. Gentleman referred to waiting lists. I, too, have looked at the matter carefully. Waiting times are as important as waiting lists. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that, with an increase in the elderly population and a larger number of patients being seen, there will be further demands on the service. I am happy to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that the number of in-patients as a percentage of total throughput has fallen from 10·9 to 10 per cent. in the past 15 years. For acute sector patients, the figure is down from 13·7 to 12·8 per cent.

There is an improvement, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the fact that more people are being seen makes it difficult to tackle the problem of waiting lists, but we are trying to do that through the waiting lists initiative and the regional centres.

Rail Services

8. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss investment in rail services in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has regular meetings with the chairman of British Rail. They last met on 8 February.

Mr. Raffan: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that British Rail cannot at present spare the £2 million needed to upgrade the north Wales line so that it can take trains travelling at 90 mph, which will be necessary if we are to gain the maximum benefit from the introduction of 125s on 30 September? Will my hon. Friend press the Treasury to provide that relatively small sum, and ask British Rail in return to stop the 125s at Prestatyn rather than Lichfield?

Sir Wyn Roberts: That is a matter for British Rail and I know that BR is anxious to upgrade the track along the north Wales coast. My hon. Friend will be aware that British Rail has chosen to invest £10 million in additional and improved stock, and that will improve the service. We shall have three high-speed 125 InterCity trains running from Holyhead to London. We shall also have the 158s operating on that line. In all, we shall have 12 trains running to London as opposed to the 10 that we have now.

Mr. John P. Smith: Has the Minister read the excellent report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs on Cardiff-Wales airport—in particular the recommendations on a rail link for the area, to bring the airport into line with all the premier regional airports in the country? Will the Minister now take whatever steps are necessary to provide such a link—especially as we could do it at such little cost?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am certainly aware of the Select Committee's recommendation. The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed the matter before, but it is for Labour-controlled South Glamorgan county council to discuss the project with British Rail and agree it or otherwise but, so far, the body has not decided to go forward with it.

Welsh National Opera

9. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the board and management of Welsh National Opera to discuss their financial and artistic plans.

Mr. David Hunt: I look forward to my next meeting with the management of the Welsh National Opera. Wales owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to that centre of excellence. I was therefore pleased to be able to find £842,000 to put the company on a secure financial footing. I was also pleased that the Arts Council decided to increase the company's touring grant.

Mr. Jones: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his remarkable generosity towards this jewel in our artistic crown. May I put it to him that the WNO plays no small part in helping to secure inward investment, and urge him to lose no opportunity to take advantage of that?

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more. I had the privilege and honour to be present in Tokyo at the closing performance of the Welsh National Opera. A very large number——

Mr. Barry Jones: Encore!

Mr. Hunt: I will give an encore if the hon. Gentleman wishes. At that performance, a large number of Japanese business men were tremendously impressed by Welsh quality. The Welsh National Opera has put Wales on the world map as representing quality.

Tourism

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the development of the Welsh tourism industry.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh tourism industry has made very considerable progress in recent years. Better marketing and provision of the infrastructure essential to tourism development have undoubtedly improved the quality of our tourism product. For this I must give credit to the roles of the Wales tourist board, the development agencies, local authorities and of course the private sector, which is the main engine of wealth and job creation.

Mr. Coombs: I invite my hon. Friend to join me in emphasising the importance of tourism in rural Wales. Does he agree that a significant feature of the rural tourism industry in Wales is the availability of section 4 grants long after they have been done away with in England? How much is being spent in the current year on section 4 grants? Can he assure the House that those grants will continue to be available throughout Wales in future?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to state that section 4 grants are important to Wales. We are spending £3·2 million on them this year through the Wales tourist board. As I said earlier, the grants are essential to the development strategy of the Wales tourist board, which ends in 1994. I am aware that my hon. Friend was a member of the Employment Select

Committee which took a view on section 4 grants. However, I believe that tourism projects in England are legiible for regional selective assistance and grants from other sources.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister accept that the development of the tourist industry depends on efficient train services, particularly into north Wales? Will he impress two things on British Rail? First, there should be no back-up buses should trains be full in the summer when reorganisation comes—instead, there should be adequate rolling stock for all services in north Wales. Secondly, north Wales needs a third high-speed train set to provide the standard of service that we have at the moment. I hope that the Minister recognises that the proposed two sets will provide the boat train services and that there will be only one service in each direction between north Wales and Euston as a result of the proposed reorganisation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am impressed by the fact that British Rail is only too anxious to meet demand. It lays considerable stress on demand. The new timetable and new rolling stock which it will provide for the service to north Wales will obviously have to be justified by its use. I do not hesitate to say that if the services that British Rail is to provide prove that it is meeting a market need and that further developments in the service are required, I am sure that British Rail will consider that.

Self-employment

11. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of persons self-employed in Wales at the latest available date; and what it was in 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest available figures show that there are 184,000 self-employed people in Wales. When compared with the figure in 1979, that represents an increase of 50 per cent.

Sir Anthony Meyer: That is excellent news. Does not it give the lie to the notion that the Welsh are not good at setting up businesses? Is not it a great tribute to this Government? Does my right hon. Friend believe that the rather churlish reception given to this and other good news by the Opposition suggests that they are a little nervous and that, whoever wins the Neath by-election, it probably will not be the Labour candidate?

Mr. Hunt: I agree. The figures are a tremendous tribute to entrepreneurs in Wales. The real issue in Neath is whether the electors of Neath want to continue through the 1990s under the progressive policies of this Prime Minister or return to the failed socialist policies of the 1960s and 1970s.

Community Charge

12. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the impact of the community charge in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Mr. Williams: Does the Secretary of State, as one of the Ministers heavily implicated in the introduction of the poll tax, now admit that it was an awful mistake? If, following their review of the poll tax, the Government announce on Thursday that they have decided on its abolition, can the Secretary of State confirm the view of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—that the process will take three years? Can the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Speaker: Enough.

Mr. Hunt: I think that that was indeed enough, Mr. Speaker.

I would have more time to consider the hon. Gentleman's views if he followed the example of Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats and came to see me. My invitation to the Labour party is still open. We are conducting a fundamental review of the community charge and we shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government are not prepared to accept the Liberal Democrats' proposal—that there should be a local income tax? Such a tax works perfectly well in many countries in Europe and it would work well in Wales.

Mr. Hunt: I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Gentleman and his hon. Friends for coming to see me and presenting detailed proposals. No final decisions have been made; we are still carefully considering the proposals. However, I still await detailed costed proposals from the Labour party. Indeed, that party has not provided any proposals and I do not believe that it is in a position to do so.

Mr. Murphy: As he mentioned costs, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, so far, as Secretary of State for Wales, he has spent £10 million to set the poll tax up, £20 million to administer it and £80 million to sweeten it? Is not it true that he might as well have dumped more than £100 million in the Bristol channel? Can he confirm that, this morning, he said that the poll tax, in some form, will continue in Wales, no matter what the Prime Minister wants for the rest of the country?

Mr. Hunt: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his information. I have been very careful not to preview the results of the review, which will be announced in due course. What really has cost the United Kindom dear is the overspending of Labour councils—particularly councils in England. The message from local elections this year will be, "Conservative councils cost you less and give you better services."

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

House of Fraser

26. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received concerning the implications of the House of Fraser report for the work of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): None, Sir.

Mr. Taylor: Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider publishing a simple guide for business men? There is a certain amount of confusion in the business community that the Al-Fayeds, despite having been accused in the House of Fraser report of repeatedly lying,

deceiving and defrauding, retain a banking licence as well as their positions as company directors. Is not this the kind of injustice that simply will not go away?

The Attorney-General: I greatly sympathise with my hon. Friend in his desire for simple guides. If I were in the business of publishing guides, I should hope, without too much confidence that I could make them simple. The code for Crown prosecutors is the only guide for which I am responsible. That code establishes that before criminal proceedings are brought, there must be a reasonable prospect of a conviction. Criminal proceedings have to be based on evidence that is admissible in criminal courts, as distinct from evidence such as is available to Department of Trade and Industry inspectors. The spectrum for a criminal court is more narrow. As for the Banking Acts, the Bank of England is the regulating authority. There is nothing that I can say about that. With regard to the disqualification of directors, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), when he was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, decided not to operate the sanctions under section 8 and disqualify. That decision is now the subject of judicial review proceedings and is therefore sub judice.

Anti-Semitic Literature

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last authorised any prosecution for the publication of anti-Semitic literature.

The Attorney-General: On 23 February I gave my consent to the prosecution of Jane Lady Birdwood for offences under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 relating to the leaflets "The Ultimate Blasphemy", "Jewish Tributes to our Child Martyrs", "The Snides of March" and "Another Blood Libel or Ritual Murder".

Mr. Marshall: Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House whether that is the only prosecution for anti-Semitic behaviour that he has brought in recent months? Does he accept that many people look forward to the successful prosecution of such disgraceful hatred and trade in bigotry and racism?

The Attorney-General: I know what a close interest my hon. Friend takes in this matter. In the past I have described that kind of literature as odious and, of course, the whole House agrees with that. In recent months I authorised the prosecution of two other cases. Fourteen cases have been reported to me and are being considered by the police. That probably answers my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Cohen: Notwithstanding that one proposed prosecution, has the Attorney-General's Department blocked other proposed prosecutions that have been put to him in the past by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis? Do the proposed prosecution and the right hon. and learned Gentleman's answer suggest a change in his policy and that he will look more favourably on prosecuting those who are guilty of distributing anti-Semitic publications?

The Attorney-General: There is no question of a change in policy. The matter is governed by the code for Crown prosecutors, to which I have already referred. Nor is there any question that any prosecution has been blocked. In recent years, no decision not to prosecute has been taken on public interest grounds—such a decision has always been made on the ground of insufficiency of evidence. As for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, the hon. Gentleman may or may not have seen a letter from Sir John Dellow, the acting commissioner, a few weeks ago in which he said that he knew that all cases referred to the Crown prosecution service were given full and proper consideration and decisions were taken on entirely proper grounds.

Sir John Stokes: Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell me whether there have been any prosecutions for anti-English publications?

The Attorney-General: No, Sir. Because—I do not know whether I should say "because", but I remind my hon. Friend that prosecutions under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 relate to publications which are designed, intended or likely to stir up racial hatred and which are threatening, abusive or insulting in their character.

The Gulf

28. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his oral answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 640, if he will give further consideration to the degree to which the use of napalm on civilian targets conforms to the principle of proportionality outlined in his oral answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns 14-15.

The Attorney-General: My answer of 4 February related to operations in the Gulf. There is no question of napalm having been used against civilians. Napalm was not available to British forces at all. The Americans have stated that napalm was used by their forces only against Iraqi trenches that had been filled with oil.

Mr. Dalyell: In view of the horrendous events that have been unleashed in Kerbala, Basra and other cities, and as someone must have sold those most sophisticated weapons knowing exactly what they were up to, should not more attention be given to the ratification of the relevant protocol?

The Attorney-General: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety on that score. He will have seen the reply that was given on 14 March by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which he said that the Government are considering whether to ratify the convention that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. We have signed it, but it has not yet been ratified. That is as far as the matter can be taken, at any rate by me today.

Mr. Fraser: When the Attorney-General advises on compliance with international obligations in the Gulf, will he have regard to some disturbing reports on BBC Radio 4 this morning and ensure that the Kuwaiti Government and other Governments are reminded of their obligations under the international conventions on refugees and the treatment of prisoners and civilians under the Geneva conventions, and the duty of common humanity which must be owed to people who have been resident peacefully in those countries for many years?

The Attorney-General: I shall certainly ensure that the hon. Gentleman's question is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs. It is of the highest importance—the Government insisted on this throughout the events that have taken place since August—that international law should be upheld. Kuwait, along with ourselves, Iraq, the United States and many other countries are signatories to the Geneva convention. I understand what is behind the hon. Gentleman's question and I agree that it is very important.

Mr. Ian Bruce: If any individuals, particularly in Iraq, who may be guilty of what appears to be a war crime in using napalm against their own civilian population come within the jurisdiction of British courts, could we take action against them? If the Government cannot take action, have they any plans to bring those people within our jurisdiction?

The Attorney-General: It is a criminal offence, under our legislation, to commit such a "grave breach" of the Geneva convention. As for liability for war crimes, the Security Council has reminded Iraq of its liability. Whether arrangements are made for the prosecution of war crimes does not rest with this country alone but must be decided in consultation with our allies.

Courts (Taxing)

29. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Attorney-General whether a decision has been made on the reorganisation of the taxing function of courts in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): New arrangements common to all six circuits in England and Wales provide that, as from 4 March this year, the very largest claims for costs in criminal cases will be referred to specialist taxing teams with particular expertise in determining such claims. In other respects, the taxing function of the courts, covering the vast majority of cases, remains unchanged.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Solicitor-General aware of the concern felt in Wales that those taxing services may be moved from Cardiff and other centres in Wales to Bristol in the south and Manchester in the north? Will he assure us that, if there is a move in that direction, it will not be seen as the thin end of the wedge, leading to the dismantling of the structure in the Wales and Chester circuit, and that the future is guaranteed?

The Solicitor-General: I am aware of the concern that the hon. Gentleman expresses. I assure him that all that is planned is that those special cases that involve the largest costs and require specialist teams will be dealt with by specialist teams. There is no question of abolishing the Wales and Chester circuit.

City Fraud

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the mechanism for the prosecution of fraud relating to the City of London; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: On 6 March I made an extended visit to the Serious Fraud Office, whose director I frequently meet. The professionalism and commitment among staff of all disciplines and at all levels impressed me greatly. So did the innovative approach adopted by the SFO to the use of new technology, both in case management and in court presentation. From the legislation of a Conservative Government, I am glad to say that we now have in place a far more formidable and effective mechanism for the prosecution of serious and complex fraud than anything that our predecessors evidently thought sufficient.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Attorney-General tell us whether that new mechanism will be sufficient to deal with that national organisation near to the City of London and close to the Palace of Westminster, which has been trading under three different names during the past four years? Is he aware that it has been attempting a reverse takeover bid of one major corporation and a Labour co-operative, and that a statement was made at the weekend by a leader of that group who, when he was under pressure, become known as Paddy Backdown?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman spent a great deal of time memorising that question but he has not made it entirely clear to me. Any matter that is brought before the police or the Serious Fraud Office as meriting investigation will be investigated. If enough evidence is admissible in a criminal court proceeding to give rise to the realistic prospect of a conviction, a prosecution will follow. However, I doubt whether my answer will satisfy the hon. Gentleman—that will depend on many factors that cannot be taken into account by a quasi-judicial authority.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Famine

31. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what extra emergency relief is being given to alleviate the famine in Africa, over the amount planned at the beginning of the financial year.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): As I explained in a written answer to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 6 February, at columns *146-47*, the initial provision for humanitarian assistance made at the beginning of the current financial year was £66·7 million. That provision is now £74 million. No separate allocation is made for Africa.

Mrs. Mahon: Given the scale of the disaster facing the people of sub-Saharan Africa, where 27 million face starvation, was not that a complacent reply, and should not the Minister be trying to initiate a coalition of nations to make that disaster the national emergency that it should be? Could not we start by having a full-scale debate in the House of Commons? The public have responded magnificently this weekend; cannot the Government do the same?

Mrs. Chalker: Many right hon. and hon. Members—even Opposition Members—recognise that the British Government went out of their way, at a diplomatic level, to encourage all the main donors to do more. Britain alone cannot end the famine in Africa and it is nonsense to suggest otherwise. We have received some helpful responses, but we are continuing the pressure on all the European Community's member states, the United States,

Canada, Australia and other donors to ensure that not only the British public respond—they did so magnificently through Comic Relief—but that other donors do their bit.

Mr. Wells: In view of my right hon. Friend's great generosity in dealing with the African famine, the refugees caused by the Gulf war and eastern European matters, is not it time, in accordance with the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on famine in Africa, to ask the Treasury for more money to boost the amount available for overseas aid in the coming year?

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I expect the humanitarian aid provision for the next financial year at least to match the current financial commitment. Last Thursday I was able to approve further allocations of food aid for Ethiopia. They constituted, last week alone, 6,500 tonnes for the world food programme, worth £1 million, and 1,300 tonnes for Oxfam's programme in the Ogaden, totalling another £1·25 million.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Minister attempts to confuse the House with her selection of figures. Does she remember, when referring to the Ethiopian famine of 1985, saying to the House last December:

"We shall certainly at least match what we did that year."
—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1990, Vol. 183, c. 291.]

That would mean giving £36 million in today's prices—so far the Government have given £27 million since the famine was first talked about in September. When does she intend to honour that pledge? Perhaps she will tell the House today. Why are Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, the Disasters Emergency Committee and many other agencies desperately advertising in the newspapers for more help? When will the Government stop being so miserly and save the millions of people now dying from famine in Africa?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Lady seems to believe that Britain should do it all—I cannot agree with her. While the information has been coming in I have responded, not to some but to all appeals that the British Government have received, be it from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the world food programme or other agencies. I have received letters from agencies stating that they never received such a response. We shall go on responding, and I am not prepared to accept the hon. Lady's tired and empty allegations. Of course, charities are rightly making appeals—I back them fully and shall continue to do so.

Somalia

32. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for humanitarian and development aid to Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: Conditions inside Somalia make the delivery of any form of aid extremely difficult. I have no plans at present to reinstate our development aid programme. I am ready to consider providing humanitarian aid directly once needs are defined and delivery can be assured. I have already provided emergency aid to Somali refugees who have fled from the current unrest.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain has a special interest in the well-being of the people of the north of Somalia because of our past relationship with British Somaliland and because of the number of Isak communities that there are here, including in my constituency? Will she take steps to go beyond what she has already achieved—she has given aid to people in Ethiopian refugee camps and helped the small water projects in the south—by bringing, through non-governmental organisations, some sort of humanitarian aid to the north, which is a desperate district that has not so far been helped by the Government?

Mrs. Chalker: I am very much aware of what my hon. Friend has said. The Somali National Movement controlled the north. Unfortunately, the United Somali Congress-appointed president in the interim Government in Mogadishu lacked the nationwide support that is much needed. The northern clans have now set up a separate administration. We do not know whether we shall be able to get even humanitarian aid into those areas, but we are waiting to hear from non-governmental organisations and from the UNHCR missions that have gone there. As the Somali refugees continue to cross the border into Ethiopia, I am today announcing another £430,000 to be given to the UNHCR to help.

Ms. Abbott: Is it true that while 27 million people in Africa face starvation—including those in Somalia—the European Economic Community is diverting aid from the third world to eastern Europe? If so, do the Government support that?

Mrs. Chalker: The EC has put up front the money that it has committed to Africa. It is not diverting funds as far as I know and we should certainly not support it if it were.

Caribbean

33. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Minister for Overseas Development had during her visit to the Caribbean.

Mrs. Chalker: I had wide-ranging discussions with the Prime Ministers of Barbados, Grenada, Dominica and St. Vincent and their Ministers and senior officials. I was very impressed with our projects and those of the Commonwealth Development Corporation and other agencies. The high commission and development division are working well in each island.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful for that answer. Were the various countries concerned with the state of the Single European Act and with the implications of the European Community on their trade? If there is no access to their goods, there may be further pressure on the aid agencies in this country to assist them. Do we have any common ground with the French?

Mrs. Chalker: I discussed the possibility of diversified agricultural production with each island and especially with Miss Charles, the Prime Minister of Dominica. We are helping the islands through current projects to maximise opportunities for export earnings as well as encouraging the European Community to deal properly with the bananas after 1992. The United Kingdom is committed to effective preferential access arrangements for our traditional suppliers. We have already put a paper to the Commission, but the paper proposed by the French

seems not to offer what the Caribbean banana producers need and it would involve a substantial levy, which we do not believe is the way forward.

Cambodia

34. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government are giving to help the people of Cambodia with humanitarian needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In the past 12 years we have provided nearly £15 million for Cambodian refugees on the Thai border. Since 1989 we have also committed over £2 million for humanitarian assistance in Cambodia via British non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies. We are ready to consider further requests for help.

Mr. O'Brien: I noted the right hon. Lady's reply, but what assistance can be given to those people who are suffering in the border camps because of the lack of fresh water supplies, which is the greatest killer of children in that area? As those people have been suffering because of war for the past 49 years, is not there something more that the Government can do to ease the situation in the border camps, especially with regard to fresh water supplies?

Mrs. Chalker: I sympathise with what the hon. Gentleman says about the supply of fresh water. We cannot act directly in the border camps, but we can, we have and we shall continue to act through the United Nations border relief organisation to try to bring relief to those people. It is not easy, but we shall continue to try. We also hope that some projects will come from the Mekong committee involving the provision of clean water in other parts of Cambodia. I should welcome that if we received the proposals.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the 17 motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Scottish Power plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Nuclear Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Mines and Quarries (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Mercury Communications Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Industrial and Freight Transport (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Caravan Sites and Pitches (Rateble Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Gas plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Alcan Primary and Recycling Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Hydro-Electric plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 Statutory Sum Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

CIVIL JURISDICTION AND JUDGMENTS BILL [*Lords*]

Ordered,

That the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Bill [*Lords*] be referred to a Second Reading Committee.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Point of Order

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This gesture that we are being asked to enact has been presented by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary——

Mr. Speaker: The Bill?

Mr. Marlow: This gesture here, the War Crimes Bill.

Mr. Speaker: We have not reached the Bill yet.

Mr. Marlow: It has been presented by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and is supported by a Mr. Secretary Hurst. He is a non-existent Minister—a phantom Secretary of State. One can understand why ordinary flesh-and-blood Ministers may be reluctant to support such a measure, but is it in order for the House to debate legislation that has so obviously been printed by a poltergeist?

Mr. Speaker: My copy says "Mr. Secretary Hurd".

Mr. Marlow: On my copy, it says "Mr. Secretary Hurd" —and that is correct——

"Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hurst",

and so on. I have looked carefully at the list of Members of this House and of the other place, and I cannot find a Mr. Secretary Hurst. Perhaps there is a Secretary of State who is in neither House.

Mr. Speaker: I think that it is a misprint for "Hunt". I will ensure that it is corrected.

Orders of the Day

War Crimes Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have not selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and his hon. Friends. However, the arguments that they have advanced in the amendment may be raised in the course of the debate.

I intend today to give some precedence to the hon. Members who were not called on 19 March last year—not total precedence, but some precedence. In view of the many right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 6 pm and 8 pm.

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill needs little introduction to this House. It is the same Bill which was considered and emphatically endorsed by this House last Session, and hon. Members will be familiar with the circumstances which led to its subsequent defeat. I should like to remind the House of the background to the measure and why the Government have decided to bring it back for further parliamentary consideration.

In February 1988 the then Home Secretary decided to establish an inquiry to consider the allegations that were then circulating to the effect that some perpetrators of war crimes committed during the period of the second world war had taken refuge in this country. The inquiry's task was to consider what substance there might be to those allegations, to assess the strength of the evidence that might be brought before a court of trial, and to recommend whether the law should be changed to establish jurisdiction over those cases.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his characteristic courtesy in giving way. Can he estimate the average age of those who may be proceeded against if the Bill is successful? Also, has he been given an account of the number of such persons resident in Scotland?

Mr. Baker: The inquiry covered those points. In the second part of the inquiry, which has not been published for the obvious reason that it would not be right to publish it because it contained allegations against certain people, there was reference to the numbers involved. The inquiry looked into just over 300 cases. Of those, it recommended that 75 should be accorded further investigation. The inquiry then came to the conclusion that there were three individuals against whom evidence to mount a prosecution existed and another three cases were considered to merit further detailed investigation.

The House will recall that the inquiry reported in June 1989. Its findings may have surprised some people, for it concluded that among the very many innocent and decent people who had taken refuge in this country at the end of the war there might have been some who had committed the most terrible crimes. In respect of a few of the cases that the inquiry was able to consider in detail, it considered that there was already sufficient evidence available to mount a criminal prosecution. The inquiry satisfied itself that the actions in question were in clear breach of international law as it stood at the time when they were committed. That was important if any new jurisdiction were not to be retrospective. But with that important point having been established, the inquiry concluded that the courts in this country should be given jurisdiction in respect of the offences in question even though the offences took place almost 50 years ago, and in other countries.

The Government decided that Parliament should be given an opportunity to express a view on the inquiry's report. Debates were accordingly held in the two Houses of Parliament in the autumn of 1989, with this House indicating on a free vote its decisive support for the principle of legislation by 348 votes to 123. To implement that decision, the Bill was introduced on 8 March 1990, when the Bill was passed by 273 votes to 60 on a free vote.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baker: In a moment. Perhaps my hon. Friend will forgive me for not giving way now.

Though a short Bill, it was extensively considered in Committee and on the Floor of the House, and was sent unamended to another place. There the Bill was refused Second Reading on 4 June, by 207 votes to 74.

The Government obviously needed to reflect upon the arguments which had been advanced and the votes which had been cast—not only in the other place, but also in this House. Clearly this issue is a matter principally for individual conscience.

Two considerations weighed heavily with the Government, and I should now like to outline them to the House.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baker: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

One was the decisiveness of the Commons vote. I do not believe that it would be right to ignore the clearly expressed view of the elected Chamber. There must be an opportunity for these issues to be considered again, to see how far views have modified or changed over the months since the Bill was last considered, and whether any accommodation between the two Houses may now be possible. That was the first consideration. Views may well have changed. Tonight's vote will show whether that is the case.

The second consideration was the Bill's particular subject matter, and the nature of the evidence disclosed by the inquiry. The inquiry's published report tells a chilling story of cold-blooded murder on a horrendous scale—killings not committed in the heat of battle, but of civilian populations in circumstances that had no possible connection with military objectives. The inquiry also showed that there is evidence of some of the perpetrators of these crimes actually living in this country. The inquiry argued that our courts should have jurisdiction over such offences, in circumstances where extradition to the scene of the crime is impossible for whatever reasons, and the Government agree with that conclusion. What we are doing is to allow the courts to consider the available

evidence, and to decide for themselves on the question of guilt or innocence. That is a jurisdiction which the Government believe should exist in this country.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He says that inquiries have come to the conclusion that we ought to look at these issues—and they are very important issues and terrible things have been done; there is no doubt about that. But why does the Bill restrict itself to 1939-45? Why does it restrict itself to parts of the world that were part of Germany or under German occupation? Why can it not be extended, for example, to Japan or land under Japanese occupation? Why can it not be extended on a more general basis, for example, to Palestine after the war? Why is it restricted? One has the feeling at the back of one's mind that we have been heavily mugged in this House by some strong lobby. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that that is not the case?

Mr. Baker: I can assure my hon. Friend that that is not the case. There are several reasons why the Bill does not cover, for example, Japanese war crimes. First, they were outside the inquiry's terms of reference and, as my hon. Friend has said, would similarly fall outside the terms of the Bill because there is no evidence to suggest that any Japanese war criminals have entered the United Kingdom. Many hundreds of allegations were sent to the war crimes inquiry, but none claimed that a Japanese war criminal was now living in this country.

Mr. Grocott: The Home Secretary said that one consideration would be whether tonight's vote showed that opinion had changed since the Bill was last debated in the House. Can he give us an absolute assurance that there will be no tortuous analysis of tonight's vote if the majority is different? Does he agree that the only thing that matters is whether the House reaffirms its previous decision and that, if it does so, it will be absolutely clear that the will of the House is that the Bill should become law?

Mr. Baker: On issues such as this I trust to the judgment of the House of Commons. There are certain big issues. This is a big issue; I do not underestimate its importance. At the end of the day, each Member of the House of Commons, irrespective of party, must make up his or her mind about the Bill. I am absolutely clear about one thing. People hold strong views on both sides of the argument. Those who believe that these matters should be pursued believe that it is essential that possible criminals are brought to justice. Others feel that the events happened a long time ago, that they concern another jurisdiction and that we should let bygones be bygones, for a variety of reasons. I know how strongly those views are held. But I place my confidence in the judgment of the House of Commons tonight. There will not be a great analysis of the Division list or anything of that sort. I hope that the House will come to a clear decision tonight.

Mr. Gorst: Before my right hon. Friend leaves his second point, may I ask him whether he agrees that allied to it is the consideration that if we do not pass the Bill there will be a danger of trial by media? Although no member of the all-party war crimes committee is aware of the names of the three main suspects, those names are known and, under parliamentary privilege, they could be made known. In that case, the most almighty trial by media could take place. That is so odious to consider that it is undesirable that it should take place.

Mr. Baker: If any hon. Members know the names of any of those who are alleged to have committed war crimes, I hope that they will not mention those names in the House today. That would be very unfair indeed. A trial of that sort would be the worst condemnation because it would be done under privilege and those accused would not have the right to reply. I agree with my hon. Friend that the way in which these matters can be cleared up is by extending the jurisdiction and holding trials.

For the two reasons that I gave, the Government concluded that these issues should be brought back before Parliament, and they made that clear in the Queen's Speech. Since that decision was announced, we have made clear our hope that Parliament would reach an agreed position on the Bill. Our hope is that on further consideration the Bill will be found acceptable in another place, and that it will be allowed to pass into law. Nevertheless, we recognise that some have expressed anxiety about the way in which the legislation will work in practice, and how far it will be possible to guarantee the fairness of any trials which ensue.

The arrangements in the Bill as drafted ensure fairness through measures such as the removal of the committal proceedings, the right of the accused to appeal to a court to have the trial set aside, and the power of the Attorney-General to agree before a prosecution is brought. But the other place may wish to make amendments. It may wish to strengthen the Bill further in that regard. If the Bill is amended in another place, the House will, of course, have the opportunity to consider the impact of any changes or amendments made and how far they are acceptable within the overall scheme of the legislation.

The Government hope that the Bill will be allowed to pass with the agreement of both Houses, whether in the form before the House today or amended in a mutually acceptable way in another place. But the difference of view between the Houses may remain irreconcilable. I read the debate in the House of Lords. It was a distinguished debate. In a way it crystallised the strong feelings that divide people. Some Members of the other place who are Jews and had family connected with the matter urged the House not to pass the Bill. Other Members who are Jews urged the House to pass the Bill. Opinion is deeply divided.

The House will be aware that the provisions of the Parliament Acts exist to ensure that the views of the elected Chamber ultimately prevail over the other House, in cases where no accommodation can be found. I very much hope that resort to those powers will not be necessary. To preserve the possibility of using those powers, it is necessary to send the Bill back to another place in the form that it was in on the previous occasion. That is why the Bill before the House is unamended from last time, and why it cannot be subject to any amendments during its reconsideration by this House.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This has nothing to do with being Jewish or with any other race or religion. It is to do with Nazis who may still reside in this country and who should never be given the time to take another breath of our good air. How many people are we talking about? I understand that 301 cases were investigated. So that we may have an idea of the scale of what we are contemplating, will the Home Secretary tell us how many cases will be under serious consideration?

Mr. Baker: I told the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that 301 cases were considered. It was thought that 75 merited further consideration, that three cases were virtually prepared and that a further three merited much more extensive investigation. That is the scale of the matter.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I am troubled by the fact that only four cases were scrutinised in detail. We heard about the 70 cases. Only four were investigated in detail—there seemed to be a case in three, and the person in the fourth died. Are we making a decision on the basis of only two cases that have been considered in detail?

Mr. Baker: Other cases are brought to the Government's attention from time to time. This is a difficult matter. Those of us who have seen the evidence have found it chilling. In some cases, there is detailed evidence implicating people in certain ghastly and horrible events.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I have given way a great deal, and I should proceed because many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, which touches on important issues which are significant in a much wider sense.

The House will be familiar with the heart of the Bill, in clause 1(1), which establishes jurisdiction in respect of offences of murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide. It is important that those offences are covered in the Bill. This is not a Bill concerning crimes against humanity. Those who have studied and debated the matter previously will know that there is a big distinction between the position post-1957 and the position pre-1957 in these matters. The Bill is limited to the crimes of murder, manslaughter and culpable homicide committed in violation of the laws and customs of war in German-held territory during the second world war.

The Bill is concerned with the specific wrongdoing uncovered by the Hetherington inquiry and is intended precisely to deal with that. The Bill refers to "war crimes" for the very reason to which I alluded—to keep the Bill within the terms of international law as it stood at the relevant time and not to bring in any other form of atrocity of which international law had not then taken cognisance.

Clause 2 addresses the investigative process that will be necessary if the Bill is passed. The Government recognise the demands that that will place on the police, particularly the Metropolitan police, and have accordingly decided that the cost should be met from central Government.

I draw attention to the schedule, which provides for a procedure in lieu of committal for war crime trials. Hon. Members will recall that that is not a new idea. Such a procedure is already available in serious fraud trials, and the House has recently agreed to a similar procedure for child abuse cases in the Criminal Justice Bill, now in another place. The justification for the provision is the same in each case and is intended to help the defendant in that the complexity and sensitivity of the matters in question are such that presenting the evidence twice over, at committal and at substantive trial, would be an inappropriate burden on all concerned.

I am, of course, aware that the subject matter of the Bill is sensitive and difficult and one on which there are strongly held views cutting across party lines. The Government respect those differences of opinion. To decide to bring the Bill back before Parliament is in no way to doubt the integrity of those whose views differ from our own. I am sure that hon. Members will feel that strongly as the debate proceeds. No one would suggest that those opposed to the Bill would in any way condone the terrible crimes with which it deals. Members in all parts of this House and all shades of opinion in another place are at one in our utter abhorrence of the deeds that occurred and of the perverted philosophy that gave rise to them.

I well recognise the strength of the arguments—that the events that the Bill addresses took place half a lifetime ago; that suspects are inevitably of advancing years, as are many of the witnesses; and that the mounting of trials will not be easy. Few of us would have wished to confront those issues again now, or to be reminded of the horrors that occurred. The fact is that those allegations are before us—allegations so serious that the passage of time, however long, cannot blot them out.

I respect those who want only to forget, but I respect also those who, without any sense of vindictiveness or with any desire for revenge or vengeance, call for justice to be done in the memory of all those who suffered so appallingly. I believe that the criminal justice system of this country is capable of ensuring that justice is done in respect both of the victims and of those accused of those crimes.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I ask my right hon. Friend to bear in mind that those who have misgivings about the Bill do not have them simply because they want to forget. The memories are burned as fiercely into their minds as into the minds of those who support the Bill. When he speaks of justice, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the fear that it might not be possible to ensure a fair trial also gives rise to misgivings about the Bill?

Mr. Baker: I hope that the protection built into the Bill and into its procedures will make it possible to have fair trials. I have already indicated certain protections in the committal process, and the need for the Attorney-General to be satisfied. There is also the protection for the accused of going to the High Court to have the matter set aside. If the House agrees to the establishment of this jurisdiction, there will be a fair hearing, in courts both north and south of the border.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary passed rather quickly the question of the Bill calling in aid the Parliament Act 1911 of the Liberal Government and the Parliament Act 1949 of the Labour Government. Putting aside for a moment the curiousness of a Tory Government making this attack on another place, is it appropriate for an extraordinarily difficult Bill of this kind concerning a moral issue, and for which there has been no support either

from the nation or in the Conservative party manifesto, to be forced through the constitution and signed by the Queen purely on the vote of this House?

Mr. Baker: I answered that point at the beginning of my speech. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an issue of great import and significance, because we are asking this House, and Parliament, to agree to a very unusual procedure. We are justified in asking the House to agree to do so only because of the unusual nature and enormity of the crimes that were committed. My hon. Friend has expressed his views in the past, and, although I appreciate his concern about retrospection and other matters, many are concerned that persons who are alleged to have perpetrated such crimes could have taken refuge in our country and be living here now, and feel strongly and passionately that they should be called to account.

As to the differences between the two Houses, as this House has expressed its view so clearly on a free vote, it is right to allow the matter to come back again and for it to go to another place. One cannot say what is likely to happen in another place, and I should not want to anticipate whether the Bill will be given a Second Reading, and, if it is, in what way it might be changed. If it is changed, it will return to this House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe (Surrey, East): I appreciate as well as anyone the extremely difficult issues with which the Government have had to grapple in considering the Bill. My right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the enormity of the crimes disclosed in the evidence to which he referred. It was for that reason, among others, that the Government thought it right to present the Bill in the first place. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when the House reflects on the matter for a second time, it should pay some attention to the views so strongly expressed in another place? Should we not ask ourselves, as we reflect upon that—because that is the purpose of this second opportunity—whether it would be right to invite a jury to proceed to convict in cases of this kind when we have been unable to persuade the Upper House to agree on the legitimacy of the premise and the proceedings?

The view that I took was that, with a Bill of this kind, we should seek to persuade both Houses of the legitimacy of our case. In the absence of that, in cases as exceptional as these, the House should think carefully before relying on the matters that the Home Secretary has advanced as justification for letting the Bill go forward for a second time.

Mr. Baker: I thought that I had heard the answer to that question from my right hon. and learned Friend's own lips on other occasions. One cannot possibly prejudge how a jury will respond to these matters until it hears the evidence. Juries will have to assess the evidence in a case and consider it carefully. The fact that there are divided opinions between the House and the other place reflects the divided opinions in this House. There are divided opinions in the country on the Bill. We feel—I know that my right hon. and learned Friend felt it strongly—that the possibility of this jurisdiction should be extended, and that is what the Bill seeks to do.

To sum up, may I say that I believe—especially in answer to the last question—that the criminal justice system of our country is capable of ensuring that justice is done in respect of both the victims and those accused of these crimes. There can be no guarantee that if prosecutions are mounted there will be convictions, which is the point of what my right hon. and learned Friend said, as that is not Parliament's task. It is our job to provide courts with the jurisdiction that they need to hear the charges that have been made and to come to a conclusion on the facts, according to the normal principles of British justice. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.1 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): On the Opposition Benches and, as I understand it, on the Conservative Benches, there will be a free vote at 10 o'clock. Usually on such occasions, whoever speaks from the Front Bench gives advice to his right hon. and hon. Friends on whether they ought to support the legislation under discussion. I do not presume to do so today. My own doubts about my decision to support the Bill are so great—though support the Bill I shall—and my decision to support it was arrived at after such doubts and consideration that it would be simply impertinent for me to make any recommendations to my right hon. and hon. Friends about how they should proceed. All that I can do is to describe why, after much consideration and a good deal of anguish, I have decided to vote in the Bill's favour.

When the Bill was debated in the House last year, I began my speech by describing the difficulties that I then faced—difficulties which I have again experienced, for the passage of the past 11 months has done nothing to reduce my dilemma. Last year, I voted for the Bill with reluctance and with reservations. I have decided to do the same today, but my reservations have multiplied and my reluctance has increased.

I know that there are those who say that politicians should never express any doubts and should always advocate a case with complete confidence and without reservation. I feel that I am unable to do that today, for reasons that I shall set out to the best of my ability.

My doubts have certainly been increased by some of the opinions expressed in the House of Lords. Lord Shawcross overstated the case when he said that the Bill was a violation of

"the basic principles of British justice."

However, no one could read what distinguished lawyers of every persuasion said without having doubts about the procedures involved in this Bill—which were expressed during the previous Second Reading debate—reinforced.

My decision and my doubts have not been influenced by the eventual rejection of the Bill by the House of Lords. The House of Lords possesses the right under the constitution to reject legislation, and we possess the right to overrule that rejection. The House of Lords, this House and the Government, if I may say so, have acted with absolute constitutional propriety by bringing the matter forward again. Anyone who is dissatisfied with the powers presently exercised by the House of Lords should decide to change them rather than to complain about them. If I have been influenced by the Lords at all, it is not by their decision but by the speeches made during the debate. They were made by lawyers who happened to be peers, and they added to the enormous weight of legal opinion ranged against the Bill. I shall turn to the legal technicalities shortly, but first let me explain why, despite all my doubts, I shall vote for the Bill.

I do not want it to be possible for anyone—no matter how ignorant, prejudiced or malicious—to have the slightest opportunity of arguing that the House has either

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forgotten the holocaust or forgiven. This is not the time to appear in the slightest degree tender-hearted about those who commit war crimes or are complacent about anti-Semitism. I shall vote for the Bill for what I can only describe as essentially declaratory reasons.

I know that some hon. Members on both sides of the House will feel that no such declaration is necessary from this Parliament, and in a sense that is wholly true, but I recall the way in which votes in the House of Lords were interpreted—or, I fear, misinterpreted—even by some of the peers who took part in the debate. That misinterpretation resulted from the way in which the entire debate about the principles underlying our action has been tilted in the wrong direction by one of the sentences in the Hetherington-Chalmers report—or, rather, a misinterpretation of it.

The most quoted sentence in that report described the crimes to which the Bill relates as

"so monstrous that they cannot be condoned".

That judgment is so obvious, so self-evident and so transparently true that to include it as a crucial part of the report implies that someone disagrees with it. Following the Lords debate, the unattractive suggestion was made that voting against the Bill implied that crimes to which it referred could be condoned. Although I shall vote for the Bill, I have no doubt that those who vote against it support the Hetherington judgment about

"crimes so monstrous that they cannot be condoned"

with as much passion as those who vote for it.

I confess that my instinct now, as a year ago, is best expressed by the much-quoted statement that Sir Winston Churchill made to the House on 28 October 1948. I, too, feel instinctively that the time has come

"to draw the sponge across the crimes and horrors of the past —hard as that may be—and look, for the sake of all our salvation, towards the future."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1948; Vol. 457, c. 256.]

The context in which Sir Winston made that statement is a subject of great dispute. I say no more than that it represents my instinctive view, not simply because of compassion for the feeble and senile who will be prosecuted under this Bill if any prosecutions come about —although compassion for the feeble and senile is not an unworthy emotion. I wonder whether it is right for society as a whole to relive the horrors of the holocaust and some of the more despicable and unforgivable crimes that were committed during that period, particularly given the way in which some British newspapers will deal with any prosecutions.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, after the end of the war, many of us —regardless of our age at the time—believed that the allies had given a clear pledge that, once the war was over and Nazism defeated, all those responsible for monstrous crimes against humanity should be brought to justice? We were pleased about what happened in Nuremberg—a different Nuremberg from that associated with the Nazi reign of terror. What concerns us, and will always concern us, is precisely what was implied by Sir Winston Churchill's words; that, rather than continuing to bring the people responsible to justice, we have allowed many to escape justice, and, indeed, to lead prosperous lives in Germany or Latin America. If the policy contained in the allies' promise had continued we might not be dealing with the matter now.

Much the same applies to the atrocities committed in Kuwait. I believe that, no matter how long it takes——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was more of a speech than an intervention.

Mr. Winnick: May I end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that, no matter how long it takes, I believe that those responsible for the crimes committed during Iraq's occupation of Kuwait should be brought to justice.

Mr. Hattersley: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I am sure that he will understand mine when I say to him that we have to discuss the situation as we find it now, not the situation as it was, when it was thought to be right to make promises immediately after the second world war. All of us would feel a good deal more comfortable if action had been taken then, which would have obviated the necessity to take action 50 years later. I have come to the same conclusion as my hon. Friend, as he knows, about the need to go on. However, I should be doing my cause, and my attempt to describe my position, less than justice were I not to deal with some of the very grave doubts that I feel.

Mr. Cormack: Only last week it was brought home to us in a horrific way that the wrong people had been convicted of a horrific crime. We all know that the crime committed was horrific, but the wrong people were convicted. Can we be so sure that the right people will be convicted here?

Mr. Hattersley: I intend to deal with that point. We shall have to consider the techniques by which the operation of the Bill, if it becomes an Act, will be appropriate within our system of justice. I had intended to repeat that it was simply my instinct that prompted me to feel support for Sir Winston's statement, with all its limitations and generalities. I intended then to say, as I say now, that as the House examines legislation, it has to be guided by more than instinct. Therefore, it is to the practicalities of the Bill that I now turn.

Part of my concern about the Bill is that, although it is entitled "War Crimes", it is concerned not with war crimes in general but with war criminals in particular. To put it crudely, we know at least some of the individuals whom the new law is intended to encompass. The Home Secretary said disingenuously that it would be wrong of us to mention their names in the House. The same stern injunction was not applied five years ago to Scottish Television, which broadcast programmes that purported to describe individuals who would be subject to such prosecutions were the law to be amended.

The Hetherington-Chalmers report refers to 10 named war criminals whose names were supplied by the Wiesenthal Centre. Scottish Television broadcast a programme that named men whom it claimed were responsible for war crimes that it specified. Newspaper articles have been written about these names and a libel case is pending. So well are they known—to answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that the Home Secretary did not deal with—that in the final paragraph of the Hetherington-Chalmers report reference is made to the age of known

suspects. Like it or not, we are considering legislation which may be used to prosecute suspects who are already publicly identified.

That leads me to my first question to the Home Secretary, which I ask him in the spirit of the debate—not in the usual style of trying to score rhetorical points but with the unusual House of Commons intention of eliciting information that might help our debate. It would, I think, be of great help to the House as a whole if, in that spirit, the Home Secretary could answer my question straight away. Does he really believe that prosecutions are possible under the Bill, and is that the advice that he has received from the Law Officers? I do not refer to lawyers more distinguished than the Attorney-General, but the Home Secretary will not argue with me if I say that lawyers as distinguished as the Attorney-General insist that prosecutions under the Bill will simply not be possible and that no Home Secretary would give his fiat for prosecutions to proceed.

I am not asking the Home Secretary whether he thinks that prosecutions will succeed or whether there will be convictions, though I realise that the Law Officers' advice is bound to be conditioned by their judgment of the likelihood of success, but, with so much prejudicial material already published, is the beginning of a prosecution even possible?

I understand also that there may be questions concerning the general legal propriety of proceeding after such a passage of time. I shall turn in a moment to the technical difficulties of prosecutions for offences committed half a century ago, but I am advised that a 50-year delay between the commission of the crime and the prosecution of the subject may in itself be regarded as what lawyers call, in their jargon, "abuse of the process". I am told that that does not imply criticism of a lawyer who may proceed with such a decision, but it is suggested that that would be ruled out simply because of the 50-year delay between the commission of the crime and prosecution.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am not a lawyer, but even if the Home Secretary says that there will be no prosecutions and that the system will not allow it, surely Parliament must give the legal authorities the power to take such decisions. We could then hold our heads up with other countries and say that we have done everything possible. That is a question for the British legal system, and the Attorney-General cannot be asked to make that decision until the House has passed the legislation.

Mr. Hattersley: If my hon. Friend is correct—I mean that in no ironic sense; I am grateful to him, but I should be more grateful for an answer from the Home Secretary—he and I can vote for the Bill simply as a declaratory measure. My hon. Friend spoke of our holding our heads up high. That is not language which I would use, but I think that he supports my view that the Bill is a declaration of principle. The House must know how it is behaving—whether it is being asked to pass a Bill whose intentions are purely declaratory or whether the Government genuinely believe that we are passing a Bill which may result in prosecutions if it is passed, for instance, during the term of office of the present Attorney-General.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The right hon. Gentleman asked me to advise him. It is not usual to disclose the advice that Law Officers give Ministers, and I must stick to that constitutional convention. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to clause 1(3), which says:

"No proceedings shall by virtue of this section be brought in England and Wales or in Northern Ireland except by or with the consent of the Attorney General or, as the case may be, the Attorney-General of Northern Ireland"

We shall have to consider carefully, first, the position of the Attorney-General. Paragraph 6 of schedule 1 gives the judge the power to dismiss

"a charge (and accordingly quash a count relating to it in any indictment preferred against the applicant) if it appears to him that the evidence against the applicant would not be sufficient for a jury properly to convict him."

Given those safeguards, we believe that it would be possible to bring proceedings.

I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech very carefully. So far, his reservations are so great that I should be surprised if he voted for the Bill. Perhaps he will be able to establish the bridge of conviction that we are waiting for.

Mr. Hattersley: I am glad that the Home Secretary is listening to my speech with such care—that is a new development. His answer on the abuse of process was not a model of precision. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he will no doubt develop the question in more detail. I understand that, according to convention, the Home Secretary cannot reveal the Attorney-General's advice. I can only thank the right hon. Gentleman for helping me to vote for the Bill for the reason that I keep repeating as my one reason for doing so—the belief that it is declaratory and little else.

Ms. Short: I am terribly troubled by my right hon. Friend's reason for voting for the Bill. If he is declaring his opposition to the holocaust, we all share that view unanimously and deeply, but we do not have to vote for a bad Bill which might lead to injustice because we oppose the holocaust. If that is his reason, I invite him to change his mind and vote against the Bill.

Mr. Hattersley: Fortunately, there will be a free vote and, putting it at its lowest, I am no more bound by the rules of collective responsibility than is my hon. Friend. She will know how loose those ties are.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I have already been speaking for rather longer than the Home Secretary and I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman a second question, which I hope he will answer a little more precisely than he did the first.

Sir Bernard Braine: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Very well.

Sir Bernard Braine: Let me say straight away that I respect the right hon. Gentleman's reservations. That is the approach that I would expect of him. But he should bear it in mind that the Bill is primarily concerned with something that he has not mentioned—the acquisition of British citizenship by people who may have committed the most atrocious crimes. Does the right hon. Gentleman have doubts about the retention of British citizenship by

[Sir Bernard Braine]

such people, bearing in mind the fact that both the Canadian and the Australian Parliaments have already legislated on the matter?

Mr. Hattersley: That intervention shows the folly of giving way—even to the Father of the House—as I shall shortly deal with the aquisition of British citizenship.

Mr. Stanbrook: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No, I shall proceed because so many hon. Members want to speak. I know that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to help me, but I am anxious to ask the Home Secretary a second question, which I ask in exactly the same spirit as the first. Is the Bill that he has placed before the House the Bill that he wants to pass into law? His speech contained a Delphic reference to the possibility of mutually agreed amendments. I realise perfectly well that, under the Parliament Acts, the right hon. Gentleman must send the Bill unamended to the Upper House. If a measure is to be submitted to the Lords twice, the same Bill must be submitted on each occasion. I think that it would not be an overstatement of the position to say that it would be intolerable if the Government already knew that they would amend or attempt to amend in the Upper House the Bill for which they are asking the House to vote tonight. Let me ask the right hon. Gentleman again whether he has it in mind to propose amendments in the other place if that is possible, because, if he has, he has a duty to tell us now.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: If the other place rejects the Bill on Second Reading, it will come back to this House and proceed to the statute book under the Parliament Acts. I am sure that, if that happens, it will operate satisfactorily as it is drafted. If the other place gives the Bill its Second Reading, it may wish to amend it, but let me make it clear that the Government will not be tabling amendments at that stage. It will be for the other place to decide, and I know that there are strong views among those on the Back Benches there. If the other place amends the Bill, this House will have to consider the amendments when the Bill comes back. We shall be able to accept or reject them or amend the Bill ourselves.

Mr. Hattersley: So there will be no Government amendments or Government-inspired amendments?

Mr. Baker: No.

Mr. Hattersley: Right.

As I intend to vote for the Bill, I have to ask myself a further question. My first question was: is it right, under any circumstances, to proceed against those responsible for crimes that were committed half a century ago and, in consequence, prosecute the old and feeble? I have concluded that it is. The crimes concerned were so enormous that they defy our comprehension. I know that there are those who argue—they have argued since our previous debate—that more recent acts of genocide have been even more horrific than those committed immediately before or during the second world war, but I have no scale of values within which I can compare atrocities. Whether they were the worst of all time, or almost the worst, or so bad as to be beyond comprehension, there can be no statute of limitations on the crimes to which the Hetherington-Chalmers report refers. I am not attracted to the simple principle that things have gone on for too long.

I should have preferred the Government to introduce general legislation along the lines of the 1949 Geneva convention, which made it clear that any war criminal from any war in any sector or any continent who might at any time come to Britain would be the subject of prosecution. That course would have had an advantage: we should have avoided the concept of preparing to prosecute known individuals. I have no doubt, however, that what the Government are doing today is legitimised by the Geneva Conventions Act 1957, and I can support that principle.

My second question concerns the propriety of legislating for the punishment of crimes committed before an Act was passed. The Bill that we are debating is not quite retrospective legislation. It comes near to it, but, in my view, does not qualify for that description. We are making retrospective changes in jurisdiction.

British citizens who had committed the crimes that we are discussing now would already be liable to prosecution. Had the alleged criminals remained in their countries of birth or not changed their nationality after the crime had been committed, they would certainly either have been prosecuted in their native countries or been liable to deportation to them.

I do not believe that the acquisition of British citizenship should be a means by which the prosecutions for such hideous crimes is avoided. I am aware of the alternative route of extradition or deportation. However, I cannot support that. I do not think that the system of criminal justice in the countries to which they might be deported, although improved over the past two or three years, is one to which I should want to see them go. In any case, I would not agree to deportation to a country that retained capital punishment for such crimes. That must mean that, if they are to be prosecuted at all, they must be prosecuted in this country.

Having convinced myself that neither the passage of time nor the extension of jurisdiction is sufficient argument to vote against the Bill, I considered the five main purposes of our judicial system: the deterrence of other potential criminals; the reformation of those guilty of the crime; the protection of society against a repetition of the offence; retribution and the demonstration of revulsion which society feels towards the crime and those who committed it.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am sure that it was simply an oversight by the right hon. Gentleman, but does he not agree that, on the face of the Bill, it is not just British citizens who are specified, but those who are either British citizens or resident ordinarily in Great Britain?

Mr. Hattersley: The Minister of State is quite right; that was an oversight. I am grateful to him for pointing it out. The record of our proceedings will now be correct.

I had just offered to the House the five classic reasons why criminals are pursued, prosecuted and brought to justice. I do not believe for a moment that the first four considerations can be remotely applied in this case. The idea that passing the Bill will deter further atrocities is regrettably wholly unconvincing. In any event, were that the Government's intention, more general legislation

would have been introduced. The Bill is intended to meet specific circumstances, as the Home Secretary said, by referring to men living here, as distinct from alleged Japanese war criminals who are not. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as a general deterrent. Nor can it possibly be argued that conviction and imprisonment might rehabilitate the offenders and, having reformed them, allow them to be sent back into the community as useful citizens. Nor are we locking them away to ensure that they do not commit such an offence a second time. That leaves the final purpose of the law: retribution and the demonstration of society's revulsion.

Retribution is far too close to vengeance for my taste. In one of his short stories, Isaac Bashevis Singer reminded his readers about the real meaning of the Old Testament assertion

"Vengeance is mine . . . saith the Lord".

Singer said that the meaning is perfectly clear. It does not mean that vengeance is generally sanctified; it meant that vengeance should be left to the only authority entitled to dispense it. Singer also said that that was not only the last word on the subject, it was the first. I am, therefore, left with the final justification for the legislation, which is the demonstration of collective revulsion against the crime and the criminal and in this case that is a justification in itself.

However, I want finally to consider what have become related matters—the proposals for legislative changes that were once outlined in the original White Paper and then spatchcocked on to a Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill which was in turn emasculated in the House of Lords.

Mr. Gorst: Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider his dilemma with regard to the people who were named by Scottish Television? As I understand it, the worst cases do not necessarily involve those who had been named. Therefore, much of the right hon. Gentleman's argument could be based on a misconception. I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary cannot confirm or deny this, but the right hon. Gentleman's presumption is not universally accepted as correct.

Mr. Hattersley: I think that there is a problem, and I put it no higher than that. If we are planning to extend jurisdiction to men and women who have lived here for some time and who have been named publicly—and heaven knows I am not a lawyer and I do not understand these matters—I have no doubt what a lawyer representing those people would say if a case were to come to court. On the other hand, if these cases do not come to court, will any other cases come to court? As well as not being a lawyer, I am not a gambling man. Were I a gambling man, I should be inclined to put my money on the presumption that once this Bill has been passed into law we shall hear very little more of it.

Finally, I want to refer to the procedures that will be necessary if convictions are to be obtained. When this subject was debated a year ago, the House generally seemed to be of the view that it was very important that the normal laws of evidence and the normal principles of the judicial system should prevail. My understanding is that the changes that were once proposed for the purpose of obtaining convictions were lost with the Scottish legislation in the House of Lords. I hope that the Home Secretary does not listen to me only on those occasions on which he refers specifically to his attentive nature.

I have another question, which no doubt the Minister of State will answer in his winding-up speech. Can we be assured that neither through this legislation nor through related legislation are the Government contemplating special rules of evidence with a view to obtaining convictions? When the Home Secretary says that television links would be for the convenience of the defendant, that does very little to give me confidence in these matters. The intention of television links was to prevent witnesses from giving evidence which, because of intimidation, was inaccurate. In this case, the object of television links was to obtain convictions. I hope that we shall be told specifically and explicitly that the normal rules of evidence applying to courts in England or in Scotland will, for better or for worse, apply under this legislation. If conviction cannot be obtained under those rules, so be it.

My final word—and I fear that it is a word of reservation—concerns the technicalities of time. In the House of Lords, Lord Hutchinson said that, putting aside the principle of time, the fact of time would make prosecution impossible as so much would depend on identification evidence. He asked who could expect identifications to be accurate after 50 years. Some chilling words were quoted in the House of Lords in support of that contention. They were described as chilling, and chilling they certainly are. The Hetherington-Chalmers report says:

"Because of the sickening efficiency of the mass killings, we found few Jewish eye-witnesses of the actual crimes. Those who had witnessed the atrocities were usually themselves killed. Many, however, were able to help with circumstantial and hearsay evidence, and some were able to identify suspects from photographs."

I do not know whether that would be even remotely acceptable in a court of law. However, we do not want to see any adjustments made to the law in order to compensate for such a thing. I understand that the original intention of the Government was to make those adjustments. They were prevented from doing so only by the collapse of the Scottish legislation in another place.

Having said all that, I repeat what I have said five times already—I shall support the Bill this evening. But I shall do so in exactly the terms that I have described—as a declaration of our intention and of our principles. I shall not support the Bill in the hope that it will result in prosecutions, or because of belief in prosecutions. Rational assessment of what it provides suggests that neither of those things applies.

4.33 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that he recognised that this matter divides the House deeply, as it divided another place deeply, and that the opposing views were held with great depth and the utmost passion. In saying so, of course, he was absolutely right. It is obvious from the voting lists that the matter has also divided the Cabinet. We now have a Prime Minister who voted against this proposal right at the beginning of the procedures. The Home Secretary said that it would be possible to see how views had changed in the intervening period. Everything that I have heard and read and thought since we last debated the matter here has convinced me even more that the reintroduction of this legislation is wrong. I deeply regret that the Government have reintroduced it in view of the divisions that I have

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described. *[Laughter.]* I do not know why it is a laughing matter. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) laughs the whole time. This is a serious business.

Whatever decision is taken, we are within a few months of a general election. I do not believe that it is in the interests of the country—it is certainly not in the interests of our party—to have this matter brought forward at this stage when our country is confronted by so many other difficulties. It is said that it must be done because it was in the Queen's Speech. I am afraid that in my political life many matters were in the Queen's Speech but they were not proceeded with, for a variety of reasons, some good and some bad. I cannot accept that as a reason for reintroducing this legislation.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) emphasised that, in the intervening period, his doubts about this legislation had increased. I appreciate that, and I understand what he said about how that has occurred. I agree with him. Therefore, it is even more difficult to understand why he will vote for the Bill tonight than it was last time. I found it puzzling, but he knows best—he is his own judge. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman will vote in favour of the Bill because we must show that we have not forgotten the holocaust. That is what his speech amounted to. I must reassure him on that point. We shall never forget the holocaust. The world will never be allowed to forget the holocaust, and quite rightly. The state of Israel will never allow the world to forget the holocaust, and all its supporters will maintain that position. It is a very weak argument to say that all his absolutely rational doubts are overcome by the fact that he wants the holocaust to be remembered.

I refer now to the contents of the Bill and to the other various reasons for it that have been put forward. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the crimes, when committed, were against international law. Why has not action been taken under international law? No explanation for that is given. Of course there is now no means of undertaking it under international law. If one gets to the practicalities, these events happened in wartime and when countries had been overrun by other countries, by armies that had been given instructions.

How many people in this House know the contents of international law today? How many of our troops in the Gulf knew whether the orders that they were being given were always in accordance with international law? They accepted that they were—we all did—but did they have any knowledge——

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heath: I should like to finish the sentence and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

In the forces we accept that we are given orders, and we carry them out. To say that, because there was international law at the time, it meant that people recognised what the law was and that they were guilty is not a justification for what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said.

Mr. Banks: One does not need a doctorate in international law to know that it is absolutely wrong to massacre people in cold blood in a concentration camp. One does not need the niceties of the law to know that that is absolutely wrong. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman does not realise that.

Mr. Heath: That is one of the points about international law. I return to my point. Why was not action taken under international law 45 years ago? There is no answer to that—none at all. A former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who has been a party to the proceedings, nods his head in agreement with me.

Mr. John Patten *rose*——

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose*——

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose*——

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton) *rose*——

Mr. Heath: I am asked to give way to four people at once.

Mr. John Patten *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the right hon. Gentleman giving way to the Minister?

Mr. Heath: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Patten: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I can answer his question directly. In the period 1939-45, or in the years immediately after the war, there was no suggestion that any alleged war criminals were resident in this country.

Mr. Heath: Many of those brought to this country were believed to have been brought by British organisations to give us the information that we required. That was part of the understanding at the time. Will that be a justifiable plea if the Bill is enacted? We do not know.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who are the children and relatives of the victims, who were not born at the end of the last war, wish to know why action was not taken under international law against those people? Does he also accept that, although a distinguished but minute minority of lawyers expressed strong views against the Bill in another place, the great majority of lawyers, including younger lawyers, support the Bill and believe that its proposals are entirely practicable and just?

Mr. Heath: The hon. and learned Gentleman's last point is debatable. I have not seen any opinion poll on it or found out the consensus among younger lawyers. It may be characteristic that those people who took no part in the war and knew nothing at first hand about the terrible things that happened now say, 45 years later, that we should take action. The weight of opinion in the House of Lords and among the Law Lords is undeniably against the Bill. No one can argue that, least of all the hon. and learned Gentleman.

No action was taken after those crimes were discovered because the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition of the day felt that we had come to the end of the process, and that was acceptable by Parliament.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heath: No, I am sorry; I shall not give way.

It is suggested that we should overthrow the decision that was made with the support of both Houses of Parliament and embark on such a process 45 years later.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that at the heart of the Bill lies the collective guilt of Christian communities throughout the world for the enormity of crimes that have been committed against the Jews over 1,500 or 2,000 years and that culminated in the concentration camps? Therefore, is there not a genuine reason for the Bill coming before the House now?

Mr. Heath: No one questions the enormity of the crimes that were committed against the Jews. I did not intend to repeat that argument. I said in an earlier speech that the other regiment in our brigade was entrusted with going to the concentration camps and, obviously, we heard about everything that was seen there. When my regiment went into Antwerp it passed a concentration camp, so I know all about the enormity of the crimes. Throughout history there have been enormous crimes, but they should be dealt with at the time. We should be far more in tune with the times if we were to deal with war crimes that took place in the Gulf rather than trying to deal with so-called war crimes that took place 45 years ago. However, I accept the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) that the enormity of the crime demands action. No one disputes that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, when the wartime Prime Minister sought to draw a line under those events, he had not the slightest idea—nor had anyone else—that the criminals would receive the protection of British citizenship? As British citizens would have been liable, why should they get off scot-free by having become British citizens later?

Mr. Heath: I tried to serve Mr. Churchill as best I could during his period in government when I was a Member of the House, and I never found him ignorant of anything. Like other members of the Government, he was informed about why many of those people were being brought to this country and was told that they would settle here. That is a well-known fact, so I do not accept my hon. Friend's argument in this case, as in so many other cases.

I do not believe that we are embarking on a course that will be practically satisfying to the law or to the great majority of British citizens. As has been said, there will be show trials, and we know what the press can do with them. We have seen what they did with incidents in the Gulf war, when those who appeared on television were said to have been mutilated by their captors, but when they returned home they said that they had been injured in an air crash and had been treated well. The people of this country will be sickened, as they were in 1948, by the television and radio coverage, day and night, and by the coverage in the gutter press. It is not in the interests of Parliament to allow that.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Will my right hon. Friend enlighten the House and explain what he means by a show trial in the case of an offence for which prosecution must have the assent of the Attorney-General?

Mr. Heath: Does anyone imagine that the press and television companies will not make the most of any trial that takes place? My right hon. and learned Friend may say that television cameras will not be allowed in the court room, but the television companies will still make the most of the event through dramatic descriptions every night. I am surprised that my right hon. and learned Friend frowns at that. Has he not seen the extent of recent television and radio coverage of the Birmingham Six trial? To suggest that the press will not make the most of any such trial is nonsense. It will be a repeat of the situation that arose in 1948; people will be sickened by it and, if it continues and enough people can be found to be charged, public opinion will rise in an outcry against it.

I return to the fundamental question of retroactive legislation. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook tried to find a way around it by saying that it was retroactive jurisprudence——

Mr. Hattersley: Jurisdiction.

Mr. Heath: I cannot accept that calling it retroactive jurisprudence is a valid distinction. We are changing the law, because 45 years ago the law did not apply. One can analyse the reasons and say that the law should have applied.

Mr. Hattersley: The law did apply.

Mr. Heath: If so, why did we not apply it? It was not applicable in this country, and it is this country's law with which we are now dealing. I strongly object to retroactive legislation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I bitterly object because the Conservative party, in particular, has always objected to backdating legislation.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): We oppose retrospective legislation because it makes criminal today something that was not criminal when it was perpetrated Nobody in his wildest extravagance could imagine a time when to mass-murder people, as war criminals did, was not against the law of the world.

Mr. Heath: I know of my hon. and learned Friend's passion and motivation on the issue, but it is splendid of him to say that it was the law of the world.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It was the law of the British citizen.

Mr. Heath: Will my hon. Friend remain quiet, just for a few seconds?

If my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) went before the court as a barrister tomorrow saying that he was acting on the law of the world, what response would he expect to receive from the judge? We are dealing with the law of this country. My hon. and learned Friend says that, regardless of all our traditions and everything for which the world respects us and in which we take pride, we never act retrospectively unless it is the law of the world. I cannot accept that for a moment, even given the appalling circumstances in which some of those people may have acted in the past.

Therefore, I object strongly to the Bill. During my time in Parliament, Opposition Members have always gone to the utmost lengths to protect the right of the individual. The Labour party has been renowned for that and has fought many battles, both public and individual, and is still doing so.Therefore, I find it difficult to understand why it is prepared to support a Bill such as this when we

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have not acted for 45 years—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not everyone."] I agree, not everybody. Now Labour Members say, "We must do this regardless of the consequences."

Mr. Rooker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way because there is an answer to that point. We fight because we want equal treatment for every British citizen and people living under British jurisdiction. Cutting aside all the waffle, the Bill amounts to a technical adjustment to nationality law so that every British citizen and everyone living under British jurisdiction suffers or gains from equal treatment under the British law. It cannot be denied that that is all it amounts to.

Mr. Heath: If that is effective from the time the Bill is passed, all well and good. The hon. Gentleman will then say that everyone, whether they came to be British citizens or were originally British citizens, will be treated equally. But to make the legislation retroactive, turning it back 45 years to deal with events about which the people involved did not know, other British citizens did not know and on which Parliament, if it did know took no action, is entirely unjustified.

Sir Bernard Braine: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, whose argument I am following with intense interest. He implies that we are embarking on legislation that is unique in this country. He objects to that and has a right to do so. However, is he not aware that the Parliaments of two highly respected democracies—Canada and Australia—have already enacted such legislation and similar action has been taken by the Congress of the United States of America? The Bill is not unique. Many of us feel that it is tardy and should have been introduced before.

Mr. Heath: It is unique for this Parliament. If the Australian and Canadian Parliaments and the United States Congress have changed their law, that is a matter for them. It gives me no reason to follow them and no satisfaction at being asked to do so: let us be plain about that.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that this was a purely independent decision and that we were not being lobbied. We all know how this began—with one of the biggest lobbies in history, in California. It was highly financed in order to bring, not justice, but revenge and retribution. That is how it all started, and that is why the Bill has been introduced to the House.

Ms. Short: I intervene briefly, for the sake of the record. When Sweden considered the issue, it decided not to bring in such legislation. The United States decided to proceed by depriving people of citizenship, then offering them for extradition. Therefore, the argument put to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was inaccurate because different countries have proceeded in different ways and have not all passed the same legislation.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, whose knowledge of Congressional proceedings is much greater than mine.

The retroactive part of the Bill is decisive and should never have been reintroduced into the House. I hope that the House of Lords will kill the Bill. By that time, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will have decided to go to the country, and that will be the end of the matter.

4.54 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I shall come later to some of the arguments of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath).

I am glad that the House has a further opportunity to consider its stance on this important legislation. Fortunately, as we have been told, there will be a free vote, and I venture my own opinion on the subject. First, I wish to spell out loud and clear that I yield to no one in my commitment, some of it emotional, to wish to remedy injustice and bring to book those persons who can be proved to have committed horrendous crimes. That is a moral duty.

I listened to the arguments when the original White Paper was presented and debated. I was concerned that, if evidence against a British-born person were found, he would be liable to prosecution, whereas a person who acquired British naturalisation or, as the Bill states, was in the alternative a resident, after the commission of the relative facts, would not be. I believe that if the facts were proved, both categories of people should be dealt with in the same way. Naturalisation should not put a person, who later takes on himself the protection of the British Crown, in a more favourable position than a British-born subject.

I understand and sympathise with the objections of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup to retrospective legislation, and there is an element of retrospection in the Bill. However, the crime of murder on whatever scale is not, in itself, retrospective. If the Bill is passed, we extend the jurisdiction—that is the retrospective element that all of us must face. I am prepared, and was prepared, to accept that on the basis that a British-born subject should not be in a worse position than someone who had come here at a later date. That was my approach and I voted for the principle of the White Paper when it was debated in the House.

By the time the first Bill was presented and debated I was not convinced about its implementation. That is why I welcome this third opportunity for the House to make a decision. It would be regrettable if, for some reason, the House decided that, regardless, it had to challenge a decision of the other place. I say that as one who believes fundamentally that the will of the Commons must prevail. But the opportunity means that it would be right and proper for us to consider afresh the practicalities of the Bill's implementation, if it becomes an Act, before any further vote. Today, I wish to dwell on the practicalities, which have caused me increasing concern.

The Hetherington-Chalmers report noted a number of prosecution difficulties, which its authors stated should not be underestimated. The report observed that there was a likelihood that many witnesses from eastern Europe would be unable to travel to the United Kingdom to give evidence by reason of their age and/or health. Some witnesses said that they would not be willing to travel, others that they were unfit to do so. The report's authors envisaged that there would be new developments, such as video links, satellites and various new devices to overcome those difficulties. That is why, like my right hon. Friend the

Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I want an assurance that normal rules of evidence as regards presentation of evidence will prevail if the Bill is enacted.

Anyone with an ounce of experience of our criminal courts knows the difficulties in successfully persuading a jury of a prosecution, even when the evidence on paper might appear strong, and the warnings about identification that judges are enjoined to give, time after time. Judges also have to warn juries that honestly held views may well be mistaken. That is part and parcel of ordinary trials, where memories have to go back only for a few months, or perhaps a year or so. How much greater will be the need of warnings in the time scale of war crimes trials?

However, a more significant difficulty would face any prosecutor of alleged war criminals: the allegation of "abuse of the process" referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook. That is an important concept in common law, where the court has an inherent power to prevent its process from being abused. The thrust of an application that an indictment might be quashed or proceedings stayed on the ground that they are an abuse of the court's process does not necessarily involve allegations of bad faith or manipulation by the prosecuting authorities. It is founded on the fact that the delay in bringing the defendant to trial and the consequences that flowed from that delay may make it impossible to ensure that the defendant receives a fair trial. The courts have the power to consider that issue and, if they so find, have the inherent power to quash the indictment.

The legal principles were reviewed by His Honour Judge Denison at the Central Criminal Court in the case of the Queen *v.* Grob and Hart. He stated that certain propositions were beyond dispute. They were, and are, first, that the court had an inherent power to ensure that its proceedings were not abused; secondly, that the power to quash an indictment to stay the proceedings on the ground of abuse of a process should be exercised only in exceptional circumstances; thirdly, that the power should not be exercised merely because the judge thought that the prosecution should not have been brought or because he felt that, in some imprecise way, it was unfair to the defendant. The judge must balance the public interest that allegations of crime should be tried and determined with the defendant's interest that the trial must be fair. The fourth proposition is that undue delay in bringing a case to trial might amount to an abuse of process. I should add a fifth proposition, which is that the fact that Parliament had only recently considered legislation might be a matter to which the courts would attach considerable significance.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Morris: May I develop my argument?

In particular, the judge questioned whether "unjustifiable delay" by the prosecution was a precondition to a plea of abuse of process. He concluded that it was not. He agreed with the judgment of Lord Justice Watkins in the Wapping policing case—the Cherry case. He stated:

"We see no warrant for not following ample precedent now well set for the proposition that mere delay which gives rise to prejudice and unfairness may by itself amount to an abuse of the process. What has to be demonstrated to the court is that the delay complained of has produced genuine prejudice and unfairness. In some circumstances prejudice will be presumed from substantial delay. Where that is so it would be for the prosecution to rebut, if it can, the presumption. In the absence of a presumption, where there is a substantial delay, it will be for the prosecution to justify it."

The judge concluded that there were five matters to be considered in deciding whether a plea of abuse of process should succeed. I shall deal with them briefly. The first was the length of the delay. In the Grob case, the judge found that a delay of 10 years was substantial. In the more recent case of the Blake escape trial, another court found that it would not be an abuse of process to try the defendants, even though the acts complained of had occurred in the 1960s. Each case would be decided on its merits. It is obvious that the facts alleged in the war crimes cases would have occurred between 45 and 50 years ago or more. The longer the delay, the stronger the presumption of prejudice and unfairness.

The second matter to be examined would be the reason for the prosecution to justify the delay. In this case, there would be the absence of legislation. The third is the defendant's responsibility for, and past attitude towards, the delay, which might be one of indifference in these cases. The fourth is the proven or likely prejudice to the defendant. I believe that the 40 or 50-year delay is likely to cause much prejudice against the defendant in the preparation and in the conduct of his defence. At least, I am confident that that will be strongly argued. The passage of time means that the memories of the prosecution and defence witnesses fade. Defence witnesses die or cannot be located and documentation is destroyed. We have only to go to Westminster Hall to see a plaque commemorating the trial of Warren Hastings. I am not enough of a legal historian to say what length of time the facts covered, but, as we all know, the trial lasted for seven years and at the end of it Warren Hastings was acquitted. Let that be a warning to us.

Mr. Gorst: The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) mentioned Warren Hastings, but to what extent does he believe that impeachment was an example of acting with hindsight?

Mr. Morris: I am not sure that it would be wise to pursue that matter now. I mentioned it merely as an illustration of lengths of time and of the effects in that case.

As the Home Secretary said in another context only last week, justice delayed is justice denied. The accuracy and reliability of recollection and identification are problems faced by the hundreds of prosecutors in our courts.

The fifth matter is the public interest in a disposition of serious charges and the conviction of those guilty of crime. While it must be right that it cannot be in the public interest that there should not be trials of serious criminal offences merely because of the passage of time, there is a counter-balancing public interest to ensure that trials are fair and take place within a reasonable time of the commission of the alleged offence.

On the basis of the foregoing, the prosecution would face a difficult hurdle if the plea of abuse of process were raised. The matter would, of course, be for the court to determine, but it is obvious that a strong case can be argued. Each case would have to be determined on its merits. That is not to say that the defence would be home and dry—far from it. All that I can safely conclude is that the Crown would face a difficult, but not necessarily insurmountable, task.

In view of those considerations, are convictions likely? We cannot be sure one way or the other. However, there cannot be much—if any—similar legislation under which the Crown would be faced with such a difficult task. Would

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it help the rule of law if successful prosecutions were found, time after time, to be impossible? If so, the Act would be a dead letter and would fall into disuse. Parliament cannot and should not exempt the legislation from the plea of abuse of process.

I have drawn on my deep concern as a lawyer to outline some of the practicalities of successful prosecution and I have tried to give a balanced view of my concern. If the House wishes to pass this legislation—taking full account of, and giving what weight it wishes to, the difficulties—we must do the best that we can with it. We shall soon learn the attitude of the courts. I have thought about the issue long and hard over the past few months and, at the weekend, I was not sure how I should cast my vote—if at all—tonight. As I am so troubled in my own mind, I shall, after considerable deliberation, cast my vote against the Bill because I suspect its practicalities.

5.9 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I shall be brief, because this is the fourth debate that the House has had on this important question. There is no doubt that the arguments for and against the Bill have been well rehearsed in all those debates, as well as in this one.

I remind this House, and especially the House of Lords, that in December 1989 the House voted in favour of the principle of legislation by a majority of 348 to 123—a margin of 3 : 1. The House voted in favour of the War Crimes Bill receiving a Second Reading by a majority of 273 to 60, an increased majority of 4 : 1, and in the free vote on Third Reading the majority was 135 to 10—an overwhelming majority of 13 : 1. Any objective observer would conclude that the will of this elected House of Commons is firmly in favour of the principle of the Bill.

Even in the House of Lords, when their Lordships rejected the War Crimes Bill, 74 Members of that House voted in favour of the principle and many others were sufficiently moved to write an open letter to the Prime Minister stating their opinion that the House of Lords is best used as a revising Chamber, and not to question the principles of the House of Commons' decisions on such matters of substance.

I will not reiterate all the arguments in favour of the Bill, which have been rehearsed many times. I want simply to state the principle that the Bill is not concerned with creating a new crime or a new kind of crime. What was done 50 or more years ago was so vile and infamous that those who did those things knew that they were committing a crime under any jurisdiction and under any circumstances. In the Bill, the House seeks merely to confer jurisdiction within the two criminal jurisdictions in the United Kingdom—in Scotland, and in England and Wales—to make it possible for a case to be considered before the criminal courts.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) that bringing a prosecution will be difficult. All the factors to which he referred will have to be considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. However, that is not the issue for today. The House is concerned with the principle of jurisdiction and with jurisdiction alone. If the House and Parliament as a whole pass the Bill and it becomes law, it will be for the normal processes of investigation, of preparation and of prosecution, should there be accused to prosecute, to take into account all the normal procedures.

Those matters are for the future. We are concerned with the principle. I have heard nothing in previous debates, in the debate in the House of Lords or in subsequent discussions elsewhere to cause me to change my vote. The majority of my constituents expect me to vote for the Bill tonight and I will gladly do so.

5.13 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Like those from other political parties who have spoken, I want to begin by making it clear that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be voting individually on this matter and not according to a party line.

I stated in an earlier debate that the proposed trials are misconceived. In the months that have passed, I have reflected on the state of British public opinion and on the difficulty of the trials with a view to considering whether it would be right to revise my views and to take a supportive line on the Bill. As time has passed, my doubts, like those of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), have grown. I have been fortified in my earlier view that the trials are misconceived and cannot be attended by the standards of justice that we seek to ensure here.

Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. Chalmers, who were responsible for the report that underlies the legislation, viewed the problem too exclusively from the point of view of the prosecution and inadequately from the point of view of the defence. That may not be surprising in view of the professional occupations that those two gentlemen held with distinction for many years. In their professional lives, they had been committed to the introduction of prosecutions in Scotland and in England but, when considering the potential predicament of the defence, they did not show the rigour appropriate to reaching a balanced conclusion.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I must take my hon. Friend to task for a travesty. I do not know much about Mr. Chalmers, but I know that it was a travesty in relation to Sir Thomas Hetherington. Is not my hon. Friend aware that Sir Thomas, before he was the Director of Public Prosecutions, was the Treasury Solicitor who acted for a number of years to protect, for example, the interests of children before the court? It is wrong to suggest that he is wholly and subjectively in favour of prosecution.

Will my hon. Friend be kind enough to tell the House whether he believes in a statute of limitations for criminal prosecutions? If he does, will he tell us when, morally and legally, he believes that murder should stop being a crime?

Mr. Maclennan: I do not rest my case on biographical analysis of either Sir Thomas Hetherington or Mr. Chalmers, distinguished gentlemen though they are. I have no doubt that they did their best to come to the right conclusion and I have no doubt that they weighed their words with considerable care, but they condemned themselves out of their own mouths. I will allude later to some of the things that they said in their report that give rise to concern that justice and the standards of justice that we are right to seek could not be achieved if we enacted the Bill.

The Bill rests its moral case on the enormity of the crimes which, it is argued, have been committed by a number of citizens and residents of this country and which are beyond the memory of many of those who debate the matter today. It has been observed that several of those taking part in the debate, including my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), were not alive when these matters occurred. It is not in question that the crimes of which those concerned will stand accused are monstrous, that they are against the law of the countries in which they were committed and that they would be crimes according to the general principles of law recognised by all civilised nations. The question is not whether we believe that the crimes were of an enormity that must be condemned. The question is whether we can establish in a British court of law that the individuals who are allegedly responsible actually committed those crimes.

It does not seem right to pass a law, as the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook suggested we should, to demonstrate to the world our abhorrence of the holocaust. As he systematically advanced his argument, with every sentence he seemed to strengthen the doubts that he had expressed in the earlier debate and ended by saying that he was proposing to vote for the Bill simply as a declaration of his revulsion against the crimes of the holocaust. I cannot and do not believe it necessary to make such a declaration. I do not believe that there is any hon. Member who does not share that revulsion; nor do I believe that the British public need to be reminded of that fact.

One of the fears that I expressed in our earlier debate was that if the trials go ahead they may elicit some sympathy for those who are alleged to have perpetrated crimes of a kind that would stand the moral order on its head. That would be the reverse of sensible.

The crucial question that one must examine in this debate is whether the defendants to these charges could, in practice, experience the facilities that the prosecution will enjoy in handling the evidence against them. I doubt whether they can. My understanding is that most of the offences are alleged to have taken place in countries that are now part of the Soviet Union. Most of the cases will have to be subject to the evidence of eye-witnesses for identification. It must be common sense that after 45 or 50 years the evidence of the eye-witness is less than reliable. However, it is also more than common sense, because the evidence from earlier committees that considered the nature of such evidence was that even those who said in courts of law that they had reared into their memories the face of the man who committed the atrocity—I am thinking especially of the Virag case that was referred to in the Devlin committee report—had got it wrong. Identification years after the event turned out to be wrong.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that when Sir Thomas Hetherington originally considered the issue he was sceptical about whether such evidence could be obtained and would be available to the defence? Is the hon. Gentleman further aware that, having taken a great deal of time and trouble to study exactly that issue, he concluded that the evidence was overwhelming and compelling?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall read from what Hetherington and Chalmers said on this subject, which I find most disturbing. They stated:

"Because of the sickening efficiency of the mass killings we found few Jewish eye witnesses of the actual crimes: those who had witnessed the atrocities were usually themselves killed. Many, however, were able to help with circumstantial and hearsay evidence, and some were able to identify suspects from photographs."

I do not believe that the quality of such identification is likely to convict or to be convincing. It seems probable——

Mr. Lawrence: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: No, I shall develop my argument before giving way again.

It seems probable that such prosecutions will not stick. In introducing the Bill, the Government appear to contemplate those evidential problems being overcome by the arrangements that are being made for television and video recordings of evidence taken abroad. Such arrangements may be open to the prosecution, which can deploy the limitless resources of the state when gathering evidence, but I question whether such an approach will be open to any of the defendants who are seeking to rebut the charges——

Mr. Alex Carlile: It should be.

Mr. Maclennan: My hon. and learned Friend says that it should be. However, I am not aware of any arrangements that have been made to finance such a trawl for evidence for the defence and nor am I aware of the practicalities of so doing. We have heard about the old people who are to be the subject of the trial. It is beyond imagination that it would be within their physical capacity to conduct their defence efficaciously.

I further question whether the Soviet Union would feel as ready in such trials to volunteer evidence for the defence as it might for the prosecution. I recognise that substantial and important changes have been made in the administration of justice in the Soviet Union territories in recent years, but I am not unmindful of the fact that in the Soviet Union the whole history of the second world war is still fraught with high emotion. Many of those who would be charged under the legislation would be considered guilty in the Soviet Union of the most grave offences. It seems unlikely that the Soviet Union would offer to the defence the co-operation with evidence that it might be prepared to offer to the prosecution.

Mr. Gorst: Is not the hon. Gentleman's argument tantamount to saying that if, when debating the passing of any law, the House can see difficulties with evidence, we should not pass that law, even if the crime that we are contemplating is odious?

Mr. Maclennan: In passing any legislation one should be aware of the consequences of what one is doing.

I find it impossible to accept the argument that this is not retrospective legislation, because it plainly is. The practical consequences of setting up such retrospective jurisdiction and of bringing into court a number of people who, by the nature of the process, will be gravely disadvantaged when compared with the prosecution lead me to believe that such cases would not be in accordance with the standards of British justice or with the European convention on human rights. Although the convention is not incorporated into the law of the land, it is none the less an indication of the standards that we have accepted internationally. Some play has been made of the international nature of the offences——

Mr. Latham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has not yet intervened, when I have finished this point.

Article 6(3) of the European convention on human rights provides:

"Anyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him."

Anyone who can say that that is possible or likely has taken a small step towards justifying the trials. However, one need only contemplate that to realise that, in practice, it will not be done.

Mr. Latham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has given way to me with his usual courtesy. I am trying to follow his argument because he seems to be arguing that the defence would be gravely disadvantaged, yet the argument used in the House of Lords by the Master of the Rolls and others, and in this House today, is that it would be impossible to bring a trial successfully because no jury would convict. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Maclennan: The Master of the Rolls has more experience than I of such matters and he may well be right. We are considering whether such trials should be set up and the prospects that would flow from the establishment of such trials. I cannot say whether a jury would be convinced. It seems highly improbable that a fair-minded jury would consider that the burden of proof had been discharged. Indeed, it seemed to be the purpose of the report to demonstrate that a remarkably small number of people among the cases that were considered would be likely to be convicted. However, there is a small number of people who would be convicted. I believe that the number has diminished by one death since the report was published.

The House should not legislate for demonstration purposes. We can demonstrate our revulsion of crime in many ways. We do not need to embark on retrospective criminal legislation to do so. I see the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), shaking his finger at me. Perhaps he would like to shake his lips at me.

Mr. John Patten: I did not make a rude gesture from a seated position. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way with characteristic courtesy. He has been exact in his use of words so far, but he has suddenly suggested that the Bill is retrospective criminal legislation. Whatever else the Bill is, it is not that. It affects jurisdiction. There may be arguments about whether that jurisdictional change is retrospective, but the Bill does not change the criminal law in any way.

Mr. Maclennan: That is precisely the distinction that I cannot understand, although I admit that I am not a lawyer. If this country does not have the jurisdiction to prosecute someone for a crime, that is a function of the criminal law. It is the limit of the criminal law. The Government are seeking to change the jurisdiction of the courts to prosecute people for offences for which hitherto they could not be prosecuted. The Minister is logic chopping. We are not in dispute about the facts. How one cares to describe them is a matter of nuance which does not carry the argument much further forward.

I was impressed by the weight of argument against the Bill in another place. I do not normally consider that the House of Lords, for all its great expertise, is more in touch with the realities of life than the House of Commons. But on this occasion, the House of Lords predicted with much greater accuracy than this House did during our debates what would happen if the Bill were enacted and the travesty of justice that we ran the risk of initiating by putting the proposals on the statute book.

I hope that the House will think again and will realise that every month that passes makes it more likely that our standards of justice will be seen to be less than adequate and less than we aspire to in Britain.

5.31 pm

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): I understand that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) intends to change his vote from an abstention to a vote against the Bill. The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) is changing from a vote for the Bill to a vote against it. The deputy Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), has changed his argument and his views, but not his vote. Nevertheless, there has been a change of opinion on the Opposition Benches.

The Bill seeks to deal with enormous and terrible crimes which excite revulsion and strong feelings among us all. That is common ground. But before I deal with the merits of the Bill, I should like to deal briefly with the constitutional point. Formally, the Government are within their rights to employ the Parliament Acts. But, in reality, what they are doing is an abuse of those Acts. It shows, at the least, a sorry sense of proportion.

The Parliament Acts were designed to prevent a minority party in the House of Commons from using its majority in another place to frustrate the will of the elected Government. Of course, that is far from being the case on this occasion. This is not a party matter and no democratic principle arises. All that has happened is that a heavy majority of the other place, with great knowledge of the subject, has voted strongly against the Bill and an even bigger majority of this House has voted the other way. In those circumstances, if the Government were not prepared to take the obvious and proper course—to drop the Bill—their duty was surely to amend it to make it more acceptable to the overwhelming majority in the other place. There is no excuse whatever for using the Parliament Acts.

The Government's behaviour is wholly disproportionate. As far as I am aware, the Parliament Acts have been used only to force through Bills of major constitutional or other importance such as Welsh disestablishment, Irish home rule and the Parliament Act 1949 itself. Furthermore, the Parliament Acts have never been used by a Conservative Government. They are being used for the first time for this, in many ways, highly objectionable little Bill. That is all the more ridiculous because, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said, the Bill was annihilated in the Second Reading debate in the other place.

It was conclusively shown that the Bill was retrospective legislation, selective legislation and, in addition to those crippling disadvantages and contraventions of the rule of law, legislation which would not

produce a fair trial. Of course, the Government are not bound to defer to the vote of the other place. But surely they are bound to pay attention to the authoritative views stated there. The Government have singularly failed to do that.

I do not wish to be rude to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who made a statesmanlike and moderate speech, and still less to the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), but why in matters of law do they believe that they know better than the extraordinarily impressive array of legal and other talents which annihilated the rationale of the Bill in another place? I am aware that the prestige of the judiciary is not at its highest at present, but, rightly or wrongly, that is because we have had some alarming cases in which the Bench was slow to realise that innocent men had been convicted. The position is absolutely the opposite in this case. The Law Lords in another place are worried that under the Bill people will not be given a fair trial. Surely their views should be listened to carefully.

Mr. Gorst: Are not we safer with men of common sense than with men of erudition?

Sir Ian Gilmour: That is an uncharacteristically philistine point from my hon. Friend, which is singularly inapplicable to a Bill of this nature.

Lord Hailsham, Lord Bridge of Harwich, Lord Ackner, Lord Donaldson of Lymington and Lord Goodman variously said that the Bill would not be British justice, that it would damage the rule of law and that it would debase the standards of British justice. Where is the matching expertise of my right hon. Friends in the Government which entitles them to dispute that view? We certainly have not heard any arguments against that view so far today.

Almost everyone agrees that retrospective legislation is undesirable. Lord Hailsham, Lord Ackner and Lord Donaldson, to say nothing of distinguished historians such as Lord Dacre of Glanton and Lord Blake, pointed out that the Bill was retrospective legislation. Of course, it is clearly retrospective. If it were not, we should not need the Bill. People could be prosecuted without it.

Equally clearly, the Bill is highly selective legislation. After the war I was lucky enough to visit the Nuremberg trials, which were presided over in a most distinguished and fair way by Lord Oaksey, then Lord Justice Lawrence. In 1946 much less was known about the iniquities of the Soviet regime. But even then a great deal was known or suspected. In particular, it was widely suspected that the Katyn massacres had been perpetrated by the Soviets, not the Nazis. So, even in 1946, it seemed odd that representatives of the Soviet regime sat side by side with British, American and French justices at the Nuremberg court. Yet in the circumstances of 1946 it was inevitable.

The selectivity of this Bill is not inevitable. It is confined to offences committed in Germany or in German-occupied territory and offences committed before 1945. Such selectivity is not inevitable and it is wrong. That was demonstrated in another place by Lord Hailsham, who said that there was no attempt to be fair, by the Scottish Law Lord, Lord Morton of Shuna, and by Lord Donaldson.

One may believe, like the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), that the whole business is declaratory—in which case I believe that it could be done better by a declaration than by an Act. Supporters of the Bill clearly want to see fair trials. Otherwise, the whole business would be pointless. Again, we have unanswerable testimony that that will not happen.

Lord Shawcross pointed out that in 1948 two distinguished judges felt that a four-year delay was too long. We are now faced with a delay of 50 years. Apart from the delay, Lord Shawcross thought that the changes in procedure that are being introduced to help the prosecution at the expense of the defence would prevent justice from being seen to be done. I was struck by the fact that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary thought that the changes in procedure were introduced to help the defence—that is exactly the opposite of the truth. All the changes are biased in favour of the prosecution.

Lord Goodman agreed with Lord Shawcross. Lord Hutchinson of Lullington, a most distinguished criminal advocate for the defence over many years, pointed out that naming suspects first and then building up evidence against them had led to many miscarriages of justice. He did not think that we could guarantee a fair trial.

Lord Ackner made a similar point strongly and expressed similar doubt about a fair trial being provided. Lord Morton of Shuna went even further and spoke of the practical impossibility of achieving a fair trial. Lord Donaldson had the same view. He said:

> "Identification after 45 years is a wholly preposterous proposition".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 June 1990; Vol. 519, c. 1174.]

Lord Blake is not a judge, but he was a prisoner of war. He said that he would have the greatest difficulty identifying any of his captors or guards 50 years later. Lord Bridge of Harwich believed that the procedures under the Bill would be a breach of the criminal process. Once again, I ask the Government: on what possible grounds do they think that they know better, on a specifically legal point, than the experienced and distinguished judges whom I named? My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary seemed a bit shaky on that matter this afternoon.

There is one final point. The enormous lapse of time since these dreadful crimes were committed means that the accused men—guilty or not—were very young at the time. In other words, they were small fry who were obeying orders. If they had disobeyed orders, they would certainly have been killed. No doubt they should have disobeyed orders, but I do not think that we can all be sure that we would have behaved heroically and disobeyed those appalling orders.

Mr. Winnick: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there are known cases of soldiers serving in the German army who refused to commit war crimes and who managed not to be shot? Surely, to a large extent, the right hon. Gentleman is trying to find excuses for those appalling crimes. Day after day, men, women, children and even babes in arms were systematically murdered. Surely the fact that those soldiers were young at the time and were serving in the most monstrous army known cannot be an excuse for their not being brought to justice.

Sir Ian Gilmour: I have not been making excuses. The crimes were appalling. I am not sure that I, or even the hon. Gentleman, would have been heroic enough to disobey orders, and be shot for doing so. The hon.

[Sir Ian Gilmour]

Gentleman may be confident about his courage—I do not dispute his courage—but he is demanding great courage from everyone. But that is a relatively minor point.

The main point is that these people will not be given a fair trial, even with the highest testimony. The whole debate on this matter has shown that the Labour Government in 1948 and Sir Winston Churchill a little earlier were right in saying that the process of retribution should be brought to an end and that it had gone on long enough. Sir Winston Churchill said that a "sponge" should be drawn across the whole story of horror and atrocity. The Labour Government and Sir Winston Churchill were right then and the Government are wholly wrong now. For those reasons, I oppose the Bill.

5.44 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I agree with the Home Secretary that, given the developments that have taken place since proceedings in the House just a year ago, there must be an opportunity to see how feelings have changed. Already in the debate we have had ample evidence that feelings are changing and of how far accommodation is possible between the two Houses. We heard a persuasive speech from the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). There clearly is a case for such an accommodation.

Above all, there must be an opportunity for reconsideration—happily, we have been provided with that this evening—in the light of the debates in both Chambers. As the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham pointed out, the evidence so far suggests that hon. Members are re-examining their positions. At this stage, the argument seems to be going in one direction.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, nothing that any hon. Member says—no matter which side of the argument he is on—moves any of us either to forget the holocaust or to be prepared to forgive it. That is not in question. Like the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, I was intrigued to hear the argument put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and then to note his final position. It was similar to the speech he made a year last December when we debated the principle. His argument then was persuasive most of the time, but suddenly he made a big jump and said that, despite all his reservations, he would go into the Division Lobby in support of the Bill. Apparently my right hon. Friend is content with taking a declaratory position. I thought that I heard him murmur—I hope that he will forgive me if I misjudge him—that, if the Bill is passed, we are unlikely to hear much more about it. If my right hon. Friend did not say that, that view is certainly held by other hon. Members.

I have sat through all the debates and wondered repeatedly about the confidence displayed by, and even the authority expressed on war crimes by, hon. Members on both sides of the argument. I did not agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) or with the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham that the passage of 50 years would make it almost impossible to identify a defendant or a witness. Those who have known war will agree that it leaves a shadow across a person that never leaves him—it leaves an indelible mark.

The days of the war were extraordinary times and none of those who knew them can ever really communicate the flavour of them to those who did not. Anyone who has been a party to death, much less stood in its shadow or become reconciled to it, will know that the minutest details of the circumstances are etched on one's mind—Dr. Johnson was right.

Given the record of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki in particular, I doubt whether too clear a distinction could be drawn, as some hon. Members insisted a year ago—notably the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine)—between the wholesale slaughter of defenceless women and children who played no part in the war and killing in the heat of battle.

If there is one phrase that I associate with war more than any other—I am reluctant to use it because it has become a cliché—it is the fog of war. War became a fog. No matter how long it went on, no matter how clear one's recollection of part of it, there was always a fog. Unlike some hon. Members, I doubt whether, this final step having been taken, we can put the horrors of war behind us once and for all or that, given Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and now Saddam Hussein, the Bill will act as a deterrent.

I have never been able to rid my mind of the concern, expressed by some hon. Members, about how the people of this country will be affected once the process starts. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has warned us of that yet again. I fear that this will stir cynicism, or worse, and at a time when Europe is looking to the future we shall be seen to be delving into the past.

I came down on the side of those who were against the proposal, and then only with great reluctance—like my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook. For me, it remained a matter of doubt so that, in common with half the membership of this House, I abstained on Second Reading three months later. The general attitude of those right hon. and hon. Members who remained committed to the Bill struck me as half hearted. That appeared to be confirmed when the Bill's defeat in another place produced only one question to the Prime Minister the following Tuesday—from the right hon. Member for Castle Point. There was no passion elsewhere in this House on that day.

We owe this opportunity to reconsider the Bill to another place. We also owe it to the Upper House that many moral, legal and potentially constitutional issues were widely aired in the debate there, in a way that they were not in this Chamber. No one who has studied the debates of both Houses can deny that the other place had overwhelmingly the best of the argument. Despite some recent comments to the contrary, today's House of Lords is the very model of constitutional circumspection. There is no breach of the Salisbury convention. Their Lordships' treatment of the Bill is ample proof of the contemporary value of the other place as a second Chamber. It is making us think again. There is already evidence in this debate that other right hon. and hon. Members are thinking again—and I am one of them.

I am entirely persuaded by the plea of my noble Friend Lord Callaghan. I share his belief that the Members of this House ought to express their deep conviction and experience—especially our experience of war. Concern has inevitably focused on the moral and legal issues, but there

is considerable interest in the subsidiary matters. One is whether defendants can be guaranteed a fair trial after 50 years; the other is the nature of the charges, without knowledge of which, given the claim that the Bill is a unique provision to meet unique circumstances—although tonight the Home Secretary substituted the word "unusual" for "unique"—right hon. and hon. Members may find it difficult to form a view.

The first of the major issues is moral outrage. It will undoubtedly unite the House. Where mass murder is the issue, all right hon. and hon. Members will yield initially to the moral argument that we cannot tolerate in our midst the presence of unprosecuted persons, however few they are or however old they may be, who are perhaps guilty of certain crimes. There are crimes that cry out to heaven for justice.

What of the legal response involved? The Hetherington report refers to an element of retroactive justice—that is to say, laws passed against deeds that were not unlawful at the time that they were supposedly committed. In this case, the crime is murder by non-British nationals many hundreds of miles from British soil.

The most balanced case against altering the law was made in the Upper House by Lord Goodman, who is one of our most distinguished lawyers, and who is also Jewish. He said that parts of the Bill would alter the rule of law in Britain, and would thus do "appalling damage" to all the minorities who find their defence in it.

When I visited Dachau, I was interested to note that, long before the horrors that were perpetrated against the Jews in the early 1940s, waves of German socialists, trade unionists, gipsies, and similar dissidents and minorities had been taken there. In 1939 and 1940, the Poles arrived —most of them Catholic priests—and then there followed the torrent.

In the debate in another place, Lord Bauer said that he is of Jewish extraction, that his father was killed by the Nazis, but that he regarded the Bill as another step in the erosion of the rule of law. When moral outrage and the sense of legality clash with such force, where does one turn in a democracy but to public opinion?

I distinctly remember the decision, announced after the second world war, not to continue prosecuting or surrendering suspected war criminals because parliamentary and public opinion was critical of war crime trials. I attended the London School of Economics with my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), and often used to visit the House of Commons. Any suggestion then that war crime trials would be revived 40 years later would have been received with incredulity. If there is one institution in this land that would have protested if there had been even the smallest dissent against that decision, it would surely have been the London School of Economics, given its character then.

Mr. Rooker: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the British public had been told at that time that it was likely, because of inadequate vetting procedures or as a result of deliberate policy—because we needed information from the war criminals concerned—that such persons could come to this country and be immune from prosecution for ever after, British public opinion would have remained silent?

Mr. Duffy: I am truly astonished when I hear my hon. Friends impugn the motives of the postwar Labour Government at this late stage.

Ms. Short: In the debate in another place, Lord Shawcross made it clear that, when the decision was made in 1984 to stop prosecutions, the decision was taken also to free German generals, who were much bigger fish than the suspected war criminals who are the subject of the Bill. That kind of knowledge was available at the time.

Mr. Duffy: The Nuremberg trials were designed not only to punish barbarism but to act as a deterrent. The Chief Rabbi fears that if such people escape justice, humanity will never be safe. The trouble is that the revival of such trials might in some twisted minds have precisely the opposite effect to that which is intended. There is a risk —and one that I identified in the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup—that the passage of time may change people's perceptions.

Late last June, I was walking down Leipzigstrasse in east Berlin before unification when a car pulled up alongside me and a couple of young Scandinavians jumped out to ask for directions. They did not want to know the way to Checkpoint Charlie, which was just behind me; to the Brandenburg gate, just two blocks away; or to the Reichstag just beyond. Instead, they wanted to know the way to the building immediately opposite the Reichstag —across the river from it—which they described as Goering's air ministry. There is a danger of desensitising a public already prone to saturation with the details of man's bestiality.

Just as Nuremberg had little moral influence on individuals, so has it failed to serve as a deterrent internationally. What is the purpose of continuing to hunt down the geriatric remnants of the Nazi scourge? Some hon. Members believe that it will encourage other nations —notably Germany, Canada, and the United States—to proceed against other alleged war criminals. Will it serve that purpose? The failure of this House to initiate any move against Saddam Hussein, who gassed an entire town, while tinkering with its own domestic legal process to permit the prosecution of three old men and the investigation of others residing in Britain will strike many people as being misconceived.

Mr. Winnick: This is one of the few subjects on which my hon. Friend and I do not agree, having achieved so much unity in the past few months in respect of the Gulf crisis. My hon. Friend referred to the gassing of the Kurds in March 1987—and other Iraqi atrocities were committed more recently in Kuwait. If those alleged to have committed such crimes are not brought to justice, but are found, even 50 years later, to be living in this country, for reasons that I cannot explain, is it suggested that they should not be brought to justice then?

Mr. Duffy: I am considering their prosecution now and in present circumstances. It is difficult to project one's mind 50 years hence, into the circumstances that would be present then. We have the advantage of knowing the present circumstances, even though there is a 50 year gap.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is right—we usually fight on the same side. He makes a difficult demand of me, but we must agree that we would like a move to be made against Saddam Hussein now.

Mr. Lawrence *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak, and that at 6 o'clock the 10 minute time limit on speeches will begin. Those hon. Members who seek to intervene do so only at the expense of their colleagues' time.

Mr. Duffy: In view of those remarks, I shall proceed.

The recent concern for a just war in the Gulf reminds us how far even the most civilised nations have progressively departed from that idea in this century. The idea of the just war was complex, but ultimately rested upon the principle that violence may be used legitimately only against an opponent who possesses the means and the forewarnings with which to defend himself.

In part, it is because the victims of the crimes that we are debating were defenceless that we all feel so outraged. However, there were other defenceless victims of the second world war. They were killed by the war strategies of the democracies. Most were German—600,000 German civilians, the majority women and children, were killed in the strategic bombing campaign. Another 2 million German civilians died during the mass expulsions from eastern Europe in 1945—expulsions to which the western leaders acquiesced.

This is not an argument for moral balance, much less for moral equivalence. No moral equivalent accommodates genocide. The moral balance, measured in terms of the individual's conscience, even among service men on active operations in the midst of the war—notably following the 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne, the unfolding strategy of Bomber Command and the dropping of the atomic bomb and its repeat—weighed overwhelmingly to the allied side. Those of us who were serving worried throughout the war—we did not wait until the revelation of post-war horrors. We were concerned at every step throughout the war, from 1941, lest we were going too far. We may be made to pause for thought on the horror of total war if we remember that it was practised by democracies as well as by tyrannies.

Because our sense of justice is so keen and because our obligation to the rule of law has been consolidated by such terrible deeds, we must question how far we can be morally justified in tampering with the foundations of democracy —which is the rule of law.

The examples of Canada and Australia have been held up to us, although their experience is, as yet, limited. Interestingly, the United States has not yet passed legislation to enable trials of war criminals to be held there. It seems that the reason is that any such prosecutions would be in breach of the American constitution's prohibition on ex post facto law. Why are we prepared to proceed when our American friends are determined not to?

Finally, as with all serious questions of law and justice, what matters as much as how the law affects suspected war criminals is what it says about us—in whose name the law may or may not be changed. We may pursue the matter in such a manner and temper as to be exposed to the charge of vengeance—and there is no emotion which is so degrading of the human spirit—or we may decide that the spirit of the times is no longer in tune with scavenging the dreadful reminders of the past. Distasteful though it is that terrible crimes may go unpunished, there are times when the past is best left to history. When people are guilty of such terrible crimes there is an ultimate justice from which they cannot escape.

6.4 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) who served in the war. I was born on the day when Montgomery's Army entered Benghazi in November 1942, so I do not remember these things, but the hon. Member does and the House listens to him with respect.

Ten years ago I discussed with the late Airey Neave and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) a debate that my hon. Friend was about to introduce on whether Hess should be released from Spandau. Airey Neave said that he had served the indictment on Hess and I asked him whether he thought that we should have had all those Nuremberg trials. I asked whether he thought that we should have made a new law about waging aggressive war. I asked, "Why didn't you just stick them up against a wall and shoot them"—these mass murderers and Nazi leaders? I asked, "Why did you bother with trials?" Airey replied that there were plenty of people who thought that way but that if we had done that we would have been as bad as the Nazis. He said that we had to have trials to show that the world believed that men could be put on trial for such dreadful deeds. Of course, he was right—as he was right about so many other matters.

Nevertheless, when I first considered this issue, before the first of our four debates on the subject many months ago, I was doubtful whether this was the right way to proceed and I shall tell the House why.

I wondered whether the Bill would lead to an increase in something that has been below the surface throughout this debate, but is lurking there—whether the Bill would increase anti-Semitism. I wondered whether people would say—as was hinted in one speech today—that the Jews had got up this Bill with their money and their pressure.

Therefore, I spoke to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). I am not allowed to call him my hon. Friend, although he is honourable and he is my friend. No one has fought harder for the Jewish people than he has done. I asked him whether, as a Jewish leader —which he has been for many years—he was worried that war crimes trials would increase anti-Semitism. He said, "No, I am not worried and neither is the community. This must be done." If that is what Jewish leaders and the Jewish community think, who am I to stand in the way and to say that it would stir up anti-Semitism? I am meeting that argument head on, because I know that it is in many people's minds.

As a Gentile, I receive large amounts of anti-Semitic literature every time that I speak on this subject or on Israel, even when I write letters to the *Church Times*. If I receive that, how much worse must it be for people such as the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West?

I decided that the argument that trials would stir up anti-Semitism has to be resisted because a greater evil has to be fought—the evil of violence and mass murder, which has to be met and fought every time that it comes to light.

When I was wondering what I should do I also thought of the extract from the Torah which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) quoted from the Dispatch Box today:

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

I wondered whether we should pursue the line of leaving this matter to history, as the hon. Member for Attercliffe suggested. As we are quoting a religious book, I also asked myself what theology is so robust that it can withstand babies being thrown into crematoria. What theology can say that we should put all that behind us and forget it? I do not know what theology that is, but it is certainly not one that I can understand.

I thought about all those matters and I decided that all I can do in the House is to vote, and that I cannot withhold my vote in favour of putting in place legislation that will do something about those who may have been responsible for the murder of millions.

6.9 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I am very troubled by the Bill. I voted for it last time, for two reasons. The first was the horror of the holocaust—one of the most evil events in human history, if not the most evil, which can never be forgotten or forgiven. The second was my anxiety that we should enforce international law. The 1947 Geneva convention was a consequence of the horrors of the second world war and the Nuremberg trials. I want that convention to be implemented throughout the world so that the tyrannical and monstrous treatment of people can be dealt with without the need to resort to war and the destruction of the innocent.

I have no doubt that Saddam Hussein was entirely in breach of the Geneva convention, which is part of our law, when he gassed the Kurds and prosecuted a war against Iran; yet our Government offered him export credits. The Geneva convention obliges us to arrest representatives of that Government in any country in the world. Similarly, I have no doubt that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge have been gravely in breach of the convention, and that under our law—and international law—we should take action against them. But we supported a coalition that included representatives of the Khmer Rouge.

Painful and ironic though it is, there is no doubt that Israel is also in grave breach of the convention because of its treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. International law and our law oblige us to enforce the convention and take action against representatives of the Israeli state.

I do not believe that such action should be simply for revenge: it would be taken to prevent the recurrence of such oppression. If the international community would rise to the challenge, we should be able to protect human rights across the world, and prevent the brutalities that happen everywhere. I voted for the Bill previously because I believed that if we enforced a law on war crimes we might prevent future crimes of the same kind.

Having followed the debate in the House of Lords, I became increasingly worried about the likely consequences of the Bill. I remember appearing on "Question Time" at about that time, and saying that I might have to reconsider my vote. I said that I would have to read the Hetherington report, for instance.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms. Short: I will in a minute.

I received a good many letters from Jewish people who said, fairly and rightly, that the horrors of the holocaust had been such that no one involved should get away with it. I also received many letters from older service men, saying, "All sorts of atrocities are perpetrated in a war. We have had the war crimes trials; it is wrong for us to return to the matter now." I found the difference of opinion interesting.

Mrs. Golding: I have a copy of the record of the Second Reading debate, along with the details of the vote that followed it. My hon. Friend's name is not recorded in either.

Ms. Short: I may or may not have missed one of the votes, but I voted deliberately—*[Interruption.]* We can return to the matter later, but I remember the occasion and I remember going through the Lobby. We can double-check, but I voted. I think that my hon. Friend should be careful. I will see her later. I will find the record. I object to such challenges. I know that I voted. If my hon. Friend is calling me a liar, we will sort it out later, but I am telling her now that I voted.

Mrs. Golding: It is not me; it is *Hansard*.

Ms. Short: I voted, and I voted for the Bill. My hon. Friend is pushing it too far.

Because of my increasing concern, I read the Hetherington report this weekend, and became increasingly troubled by it. I was struck by the enormous difficulties faced by the people who have to travel around the world trying to find out the real names of the individuals concerned, establishing whether they had found the right ones and collecting evidence in faraway countries from people who did not speak English and were also very elderly. I felt increasingly that we would not be able to obtain accurate information, and that it was dangerous to contemplate any trials.

There can be no excuse or forgiveness for such terrible crimes as those committed in the Baltics, the Ukraine and Byelorussia; but they were committed 46 years ago, and the witnesses involved are very old, as are those alleged to be guilty. It is hard to believe that identification will necessarily be accurate or, indeed, that the evidence will be so. I fear that fair trials will be impossible. I also see a real danger that, as frail and elderly people are brought to trial, the effect on public opinion will be the creation of sympathy for those who are charged and the lessening of anger about the evil of the crimes that were committed. People will not be reminded of the horrors of the war.

My other fear is that, because we ceased to try war criminals in 1948, we will be haphazard about who is tried now. Some war criminals who committed much worse offences than others may get away with it. Surely it is deeply wrong that, because of the way in which the Baltic issue arose, the less evil criminals may be the ones who are brought to trial.

In Australia, where powers have been taken to try war criminals, no trials have taken place. In Canada, there has been one such trial. A man was tried for enormously serious offences—organising the shipping of large numbers of Jews to concentration camps. There were many witnesses; the man was acquitted. That is another angle. First, the Bill might result in unfair trials; secondly, public opinion might be sympathetic to the old men, rather than angry about the evils that had been committed; thirdly, serious war criminals might be acquitted because of the passage of time and the attendant doubts. That is what happened in the Canadian case.

[Ms. Short]

If the Bill is not passed, it will be open to the Government to consider stripping British citizenship from any individual against whom there is evidence. The possibility of extradition also remains open. I stress to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) that the Bill is not the only possible remedy.

Mr. Allason: The hon. Lady passed over one point very quickly. Is she advocating the extradition of people from this country so that they can be tried elsewhere? The only countries likely to accept them would be those that retain capital punishment.

Ms. Short: I am not advocating anything. I am simply saying that I oppose the Bill, and that, if we reject it, we have other options in regard to individuals against whom we have seen no evidence. I have read the report: it tells of serious allegations. There is a historical description of the awful things that happened in the Baltic states and the Ukraine, but we do not know the nature of the allegations made against the individuals whose cases have been looked into. If we reject the Bill, and if some of the evidence becomes available—if we want to take action against some monstrous war criminal living in our country—it will be open to us to consider stripping him of British citizenship, symbolically and demonstrably. Alternatively, we could decide on deportation or extradition. We may want to consider that in future, given the changing situation in the Soviet Union.

The crimes that we are discussing—the holocaust, and all that happened in the second world war—can never be forgiven. The guilt of those involved goes with each of them to the grave. I oppose the Bill, however. I do not believe that the trials would lead to justice; I fear that they would lead to a diminution in public anger about the historical crimes that were committed. I believe that the House would be making a grave mistake if it proceeded with the Bill.

6.18 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): First, let me tell the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has consulted the Division list and has confirmed that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) voted. No doubt her hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) will apologise in due course, but not in the 10 minutes allotted to me.

Mrs. Golding *rose*——

Mr. Amery: No. I will not give way.

Mrs. Golding: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Latham: It is injury time.

Mrs. Golding: It is indeed. I assure the House that I have consulted the record of the Second Reading debate and the subsequent vote as recorded in *Hansard* and that my hon. Friend's name does not appear.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. This may be a point of interest, but it is not a point of order for the Chair. It does not concern the Chair which way an hon. Member voted, or whether she voted at all.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will allow the clock to start now.

We all agree that it is a long-standing convention that in the ordinary way the Executive should never interfere in the judicial process, but here we are not concerned with the judicial process; we are concerned with new legislation. Therefore, it is not only our right but our duty to consider the political circumstances that surround the Bill. It is aimed at a certain number of individuals of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Ukrainian origin and citizenship in their own time. They joined the German forces to fight against the Russians whom they regarded as their natural enemies. None of that in any way excuses any crime that they may have committed. However, within a few months of the crimes that they are alleged to have committed, Soviet citizens were committing similar crimes in much the same locality. The Bill does not provide for the prosecution of any of those individuals if, by any chance, they happen to be already resident in this country, which is unlikely but not inconceivable.

The Ukraine and the Baltic states are, alas, again on the agenda. The process of liberation or reoccupation that characterised the events that we are talking about is already, in a smaller way—thank God, so far—taking place. I doubt very much the validity of the argument advanced by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) about the importance of a declaratory gesture. This Bill would be declaratory against those who sided, as they thought, with those who were fighting for the liberation of their country against the Soviets, but it would not be declaratory against those who committed similar crimes on behalf of the Soviet Union. That would be to send the wrong message.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) talked about show trials. He was completely right. I am sure that the judiciary would conduct the trials in an honourable way, but we have to consider not only what our press would say; imagine the meal that the hard-line press in Moscow would make of them. They would show up Baltic atrocities on the Nazis side but would make no reference to any atrocities that might have been committed by the Soviets in a similar context. We must take account of the international context.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) movingly drew attention to the war crimes being committed by Iraq now, against both the Kuwaitis and their own people. Apart from loose talk, I can find no procedure for penalising those who are committing such crimes—the leaders in particular. As far as I can make out, we are referring in this Bill to people who would be the equivalent of non-commissioned officers or warrant officers in this country.

Apart from the issue having been blown out of proportion, the Bill is historically wrong. We are always told that generals want to fight the last war. Here it is a question of the lawyers wanting to fight the last war. They are trying to fight the unfinished business of the second world war without paying the slightest regard in the Bill to the crimes that have been committed since then. That must offend our sense of equity and justice. To make just another declaration against the unforgivable holocaust and to say nothing about the crimes that have been committed since seems to me grotesque.

One of the curious aspects of eastern Europe at present —I follow its affairs as closely as I can—is how little

evidence there is so far of vengeance and vendetta. There is the German protest about Mr. Honecker being taken off to Russia for medical treatment, but there have been very few charges. We should take that into account. A degree of merciful oblivion is required because, Lord knows, the crimes committed in eastern Europe, not only by the Germans in their day but by the Soviets in theirs, are equally unforgivable. We have to live with that. The time has come, to use Churchill's phrase, to pass a merciful sponge over the record. The House ought to do nothing that would revive old antagonisms and reopen old wounds. That would be beneath the dignity of this House.

At a time when our judiciary is under some question, the Bill that we are discussing does not seem to provide a solid basis for a constitutional challenge to the other place. We should do well to reject it and to think again about the future—about whether there is the need for wider legislation to encompass war crimes in all parts of the world, if war criminals should come to reside here. I hope that they will not, but if that happened perhaps there ought to be another measure to deal with them. Entirely to direct our fire at a few old men who are the relics of the second world war and to ignore in any declaratory announcement what has happened since would be little short of obscene.

Ms. Short: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was accused, in effect, of being a liar by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), may I say that on 12 December 1989 we endorsed in a vote the need for legislation on the basis of the Hetherington-Chalmers report. I voted for that. Thereafter, I abstained in the vote on the Bill, and I shall vote against it tonight. That is the position, which I wanted to put on the record.

Mrs. Golding: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Lady sure that her point of order is for the Chair and something that I can resolve? I cannot resolve much, but I shall try to resolve this point of order.

Mrs. Golding: Was it in order for my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) to call me a liar?

Ms. Short: I did not. I said you called me a liar.

Mrs. Golding: I was quoting from *Hansard*, which cannot lie, as we all know.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have had enough points of order which do not relate to the debate.

6.27 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): I have read every speech on this matter since the principle of the Bill was first debated in December 1989. One of the most impressive facts that I have learnt from those speeches was the absolute sincerity of Members of the other place and of this when addressing themselves, without rancour, to the issue. An interesting facet of the debate is that Members of both Houses have expressed their differing points of view with great skill, thought and responsibility. This, therefore, is one of those occasions when there is no need for any hon. Member to get upset. The House is addressing the issue in a highly responsible manner.

I remind the House that this is a Bill to

"Confer jurisdiction on United Kingdom courts in respect of certain grave violations of the law and customs of war".

We are being asked to pass legislation that would enable our courts to deal with breaches of the laws and customs of war. I remind the House that for over 100 years we have been signatories to a bank of international jurisprudence and international law—treaties and conventions that addressed violations of the laws and customs of war. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves whether it is correct to suggest for one moment that the House of Commons was wrong to introduce the Bill. Before the mid-1980s, the House, the Government and the country were not aware that war criminals were living in Britain, so there was no need to question our commitment to the European convention on human rights or the Hague convention. To comply with conventions made following the second world war, all civilised nations accepted that the passage of time should not inhibit a country in dealing with war criminals.

In the mid-1980s we became aware of the possibility of war criminals living in Britain and hon. Members set up a war crimes group, of which I had the honour of being a member. We carefully considered the information that was available to us. To its credit, the group made it abundantly clear that it would not reach hasty conclusions and set about, through the Home Office, seeing how best it could assist the House in reaching a reasonable conclusion—thus, the Hetherington report.

After that, as senior hon. Members will understand, the Government had to go through the processes of drafting a Bill and so on, so it was not a hasty process. In 1989, we were asked to discuss the principle of the Bill.

The Hetherington report deals with restrospection. Page 92 says:

"Both the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) contain Articles to prevent the introduction of retrospective legislation. Both, however, contain provisos to allow the trial and punishment of persons for acts or omissions which were, at the time they were committed, already regarded as criminal by the international standard."

That is quite clear. Page 97 says:

"In our view, to enact legislation in this country to give the British courts jurisdiction over murder and manslaughter committed as violations of the laws and customs of war would not be to create an offence retrospectively."

That was the view of people who had considerable legal experience.

Some specious arguments were advanced in the other place on whether we should proceed with the Bill. If we are complying with international jurisprudence on retrospection and therefore not committing an offence in our own country or abroad, it is pertinent for someone to ask, "After all these years, should we hesitate because of the possibility of an unfair trial?" As I said in debate in March last year, that is not the job of this House. Many lawyers who spoke on the Bill in the other place and in this House made the mistake of addressing a court. We give courts the powers to work. If a judge believes that a trial may be unfair, he can stop it; he does not consult the House because that proviso applies to all trials.

Another objection to the Bill is that more than 40 years have passed. I understand that a Member of the other place said, "After 40 years, old men forget." I served as a young officer in the war and I am now 72, but I am neither old nor do I forget. If I committed an offence, no hon. Member would say "Do not go to court because you cannot defend yourself." I am quite capable of doing that.

[Mr. Ted Leadbitter]

We are tampering retrospectively with laws on evidence, which is not our job. Our job is to provide the courts and investigating authorities with the powers to get on with their work. I do not want to criticise lawyers, but sometimes they think that they have a monopoly of reason and experience. Often, they have a monopoly of mediocrity. Those who have been in public life for many years know when to advance an objective case. No prosecuting counsel, Director of Public Prosecutions or person involved in instigating committals will proceed if there is a lack of evidence or doubts about a case.

It was said in the other place that these trials will cost £12 million. Not long ago, £5 million was spent on finding out whether five officers were telling the truth in the Cleveland child abuse case.

I have firmly mentioned the duties of the investigating and judicial authorities. Our duty is to comply with the letter of the Bill and to enable courts to bring someone to trial if they can do so.

6.37 pm

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Although my argument is a factor for consideration, it is not necessarily the main justification for giving the Bill a Second Reading. The evidence against some of the alleged war criminals is not known only to the Home Office. Although some of the names on the Hetherington list have been broadcast on Scottish Television, it does not follow that they are the chief or the only people who will be investigated.

Information is now available that war criminals are living in our midst—this is the new factor that did not exist 40 years ago—but do we want to endanger ourselves with the ugly and distasteful alternative of trial by media? Make no mistake, names may be leaked and the media will decide what to do if we do not pass the Bill and provide a legal procedure.

The accused will have more protection from the processes of law than he would from the jungle of media harassment. In court, he will have to face evidence, and only evidence that is admissible and properly tested. If, as the Law Lords and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) suggest, that evidence is inadequate, the accused will be exonerated; he will be found not guilty and acquitted and that will be the end of the matter. If we do not provide for a trial in a court of law, the "evidence" that will be adduced by the media will be based on hearsay; it will be untested, tendentious and partial. The verdict will never be promulgated. The case will be inconclusive and an ugly slur will remain. I therefore believe that the Bill is in the interests not only of justice—as has been argued by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House—but, ultimately, of the accused.

I accept that an unpleasant prospect is no excuse for choosing an undesirable or unjustifiable legal procedure. That would not be my contention. However, I do not believe that the Bill is either desirable or unjustifiable. It is a necessary deterrent to show not only the willingness of the House to act but its unwillingness to forget. The Bill is justifiable because the infamies committed were so infamous. That has been true not just before their perpetration but at the moment of their commission and ever since. The fullest possible penalties and legal processes are called for, and are justified.

Last Tuesday, when we discussed the procedure motion, I asked whose conscience matters most in our system of government: is it that of the elected or of the erudite in another place? If we will the end, we must justify the means. If we want justice, we must legislate to obtain it. Leaving the matter to the media would be an abdication of responsibility and would be quite without justification.

6.42 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): To the best of my knowledge—in case hon. Members should wish to interrupt me—I have attended every one of our debates on this matter. I have intervened from time to time, but this is the first occasion on which I have made a speech—and I came to the House today not to make a speech but to listen to the opening speeches and as much of the argument as possible.

Let me make it absolutely clear that I have not read the House of Lords debate. I make no apology for that. I was elected to the House of Commons to use my common sense and judgment to the best of my ability. We make mistakes, and sometimes we have a second chance and can rectify them. Nevertheless, on this issue, I have remained consistent throughout.

I read the Hetherington-Chalmers report, and, some time after it was published, I had the opportunity to listen to both authors address a small conference here in London and to question them. At that time, we also had the opportunity to question the head of the war crimes investigation offices in the United States, Canada and Australia, and I took that opportunity. I was convinced that they had made the right decisions and were proceeding correctly. I accept that the American circumstances are different. The Americans have done something that, frankly, we would not have contemplated doing. In some ways, I am sad that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is not in the Chamber. The Americans have extradited back to the Soviet Union and effectively deprived people of citizenship —a concept that both Government and Opposition have forsworn. If the Bill fails, that is not an option. I cannot understand how my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood can think that it is. How can she think that if, for whatever reason, this House, or both Houses, decide by a majority not to proceed with the Bill, there will be a long stop—that we can try something else such as depriving people of citizenship or extraditing them? We have forsworn that concept throughout by accepting the recommendations of the Hetherington-Chalmers report, which sets out the matter in detail. For reasons that all of us on both sides of the House understand, we would not extradite; that is not an option. The Bill represents our only opportunity to redress a wrong and correct an anomaly—and I accept that, in this context, that is a somewhat neutral word—in our nationality legislation, so that everyone who is at present a British citizen or residing in Britain under our protection is treated equally.

In an earlier intervention, I caused my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to be accused of saying that this is just a declaratory Bill. I do not think that my right hon. Friend put it quite like that and it was unfair of hon. Members to

suggest that he did. In my intervention, I suggested that, once the House had passed the Bill following an open debate based upon the evidence put to us, it would not matter to us if the prosecuting authorities in their wisdom decided not to take a prosecution or, once someone had been charged, not to proceed with an action in court. That is the decision of the prosecuting authorities and it is not for the House to prejudge the issue by refusing to pass the Bill. That needs to be made absolutely clear, and as a non-lawyer I can say that because I do not have hang-ups about whether I am in court or in the House of Commons. I am here as a legislator. Unlike the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Attorney-General and the prosecuting authorities, I do not have to make those decisions.

I do not think that enough has been made of the fact that we are not talking about crimes committed during conflict between armed forces. We are talking about the mass murder of unarmed civilians of all ages—the wiping out of whole villages. In some cases, it never even came to concentration camps; the victims did not even get that far.

Suppose that the House does not pass the Bill. I hope that that will not happen, but, if it does, the Government ought to respond by ensuring that volume 2 of the Hetherington-Chalmers report is published so that the British public can make their own judgment. It could be published without the names—I would not go so far as to suggest that they should be included—but the British public should see the details of the crimes to which volume 1 refers and the reasons given for our passing the Bill. It is crucial that the matter should be out in the open so that the British public can judge for themselves.

For all the world, one might think that war crimes prosecutions had stopped around the world, but the German Government are still proceeding with war crimes prosecutions—not vigorously enough, in my view, as General Mohnke is still collecting his £400-a-week pension and the Germans still have not made up their minds whether to take any action. After the war, the British military forces were looking for General Mohnke. The evidence is there in our files and the Germans are considering the matter. If they agree that it is right to do so, they will press a charge. They have not wiped the slate clean. The Germans are also looking for Mr. Honecker. One presumes that they want him back so that they can look at what happened years ago. Time cannot diminish the gravity of the crimes that we are discussing, and it would send the wrong signals to the rest of the world if we suggested that it could.

The concept of deterrence has been mentioned. I agree that the Bill will not necessarily provide a deterrent because we are talking about a short period of history during which a small group of people have escaped justice because of a quirk of nationality law. We are told, "This cannot happen because the quirk has been corrected both by British and by international law."

During this debate and earlier debates on the subject, I have been reminded of a telling phrase uttered at the Dispatch Box 10 years ago and in a slightly different context. The former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, said of a statement by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), then herself Prime Minister, that it was like the rustle of dead leaves. This Bill relates to issues that date back much further than the issue to which my right hon. Friend referred on that occasion. However, crimes were committed and people are living in this country who have not been charged.

The money argument about the cost of the trial and the investigation is irrelevant. The former Home Secretary stated that there would not be a shortage of money to pursue a defence. The trials would be fair, but this House and the other place must consider the point made by the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst). These issues will not go away. Many people outside the parliamentary system have names and dossiers and that information may be misused. There could very well be trial by media.

We should not be afraid to legislate because we are worried about the standards of *The Sun*. Similarly, by not legislating, we might give a free reign to the gutter press. We can control matters by legislation with an organised process under which people can receive justice.

The threat of being charged may have a salutary effect. It should be made abundantly clear that not all war crimes were committed by the losing side. In respect of evidence, there is chapter and verse to prove that, if General Patton had survived the war, he would have been in real trouble.

However, in this case, evidence is available and charges have been made. Over the past five or six years it has become clear that this country did not know that we had allowed alleged war criminals to reside in this country and obtain British citizenship. If they are criminals, those people clearly told lies to obtain citizenship. Therefore, it should be possible to charge them under a law that would treat them the same as me and everyone else in this House. I see no justification for allowing a quirk of British nationality law to prevent them from being charged if there is sufficient evidence for it.

6.51 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): A terrible thing happened half a century ago. Millions of people died and millions more were deeply and unimaginably wronged. The acid is still gnawing at their souls. They exist and they survive, but their lives have been destroyed.

There is a justifiable motive for the Bill which one would share if one were an heir to the holocaust. One could not rest until justice had been seen to be done. We can begin to understand the feelings of some of those people, but we cannot begin to understand their full depth. However, we are entitled to ask questions on their behalf. Would it help if these dreadful details were laid bare and they were forced to relive the horrors of the past in a show trial or a series of show trials? Whatever my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General may say, there will be show trials as was the case with the Demjanjuk trial in Israel. The hopes of those unfortunate people may be justified if the prosecution is successful. If not, would not it be a harrowing experience to fall at the final hurdle?

No one would dispute or wish to stand in the way of the motivation of justice. However, if justice is unlikely to be secured, is not that a justification for the view that the exercise is best avoided on everyone's behalf?

Mr. Allason: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marlow: No, I do not have enough time.

There is another motivation involved apart from the motivation of justice. Here I am forced to refer to the speech of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). He seemed to say that the Bill was unnecessary; prosecutions would be unlikely to succeed; the Bill is not good legislation and is unlikely to

[Mr. Marlow]

produce justice, but none the less he was forced to vote for it because he might otherwise be labelled anti-Semitic. He would be happy to see a law placed on the statute book, not for the better governance of Britain, but, as I said in my point of order earlier, as a gesture. In one of those characteristic acts of political courage that we have come to associate with the right hon. Gentleman, that exercise in moral gymnastics has been devised purely to get a persistent and effective lobby off his ample back.

What is it about the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook? He can argue passionately for a principle and believe passionately in it, but he is forced to vote against lest his motivation is misconstrued. I would rather be a used car salesman. As I said, there is another possible motive—and that is propaganda. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has naively allowed himself to become the tool of such an exercise.

I asked my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary why the Bill was restricted to 1939 to 1945, to areas of German influence and to British citizens. He said that there were no cases from Japan, from other periods or other parts of the world. However, the people about whom we are concerned were not British. Their crimes were not committed in Britain and they were not under British jurisdiction. Their victims were not British. If the principle of the Bill holds good, why not extend it to those cases in which British interests and individuals were involved? This is, after all, the British Parliament.

I am afraid that we have allowed ourselves to become involved in a propaganda exercise which happens to be against British interests and British policies in the middle east. We are puppets on a string. My fear is that we are dancing to a tune that is played by the most sophisticated and heavily orchestrated lobby of the post-war world. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) explained more tactfully than I, is it not at least possible that the victims and bereaved of this the most savage, extensive and depraved mass crime of our century are being used cynically in an act of policy by the state of Israel to build up a wall of moral blackmail behind which the excesses and ambitions of that state can shelter without criticism?

We all mourn the holocaust and its victims, both dead and alive. However, we should have nothing to do with this Bill.

6.56 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) mounted once again his favourite hobby horse and it surprised none of us that he saw a conspiracy linked to the same sources to which he often refers. The only surprise was that black people did not get a mention. We know how hostile and antagonistic he is to people who do not have white skins.

I do not dispute for a moment that the Bill is in many ways unsatisfactory. I agreed with much of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said. He understandably argued the pros and cons and concluded that he would vote in favour of the Bill, but I share some of his reservations about the Bill, although perhaps not to the same degree. The machinery that the Bill provides is, in many ways, unsatisfactory.

I recognise some of the obvious difficulties in dealing with crimes committed 50 years ago. Neither am I unaware that if the measure become law and charges are brought, there could be what I and others would describe as misplaced sympathy for the defendants. I recognise the limitations and that is why I have reservations about the Bill.

However, what is the alternative? If there is sufficient evidence that those who are known to have committed the most monstrous crimes against humanity are living in Britain, and if under the present law no action can be taken, we would be turning a blind eye. We would simply be saying that it was unfortunate and that we wished that we had known of those people's records when they arrived here. However, we would be able to take no action, despite the fact that the Home Secretary told the House that there seems to be substantial evidence at least against three people currently living in this country.

I cannot accept that justice should fail to be done because such crimes were committed so many years ago. Of course, it would have been much better had justice been done at the time. The allies could have pursued Nazi criminals at the end of the war. Action after the war was promised when this House first learned of the extermination camps. There were statements about the atrocities. The late Sydney Silverman—to his lasting credit—said that the House should rise in memory of the victims. During the war, there was a very strong feeling that action should be taken. I understand that feeling. Of course, very little was done.

To the credit of the allies, justice was undoubtedly done at the Nuremberg proceedings. There were other proceedings too. However, by 1948-49 the cold war had begun, and there was not much enthusiasm for such action. Many of the sentiments that were expressed today by the right hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Mr. Amery) could be used to describe feelings in the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1950s and the 1960s. There was no real wish for proceedings against people accused of Nazi war crimes. Only because of international pressure—to some extent, pressure inside Germany, but pressure that was much more international, which the hon. Member for Northampton, North might regard as some kind of conspiracy—did the German authorities agree that such crimes against humanity should not be covered by any statute of limitations.

In the period since we last debated this subject, the Gulf war has taken place. One thinks of the atrocities that were carried out in Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's thugs. I take the view that the people who committed those crimes—not 50 years ago, but within the last few months—should be brought to justice.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a major difference between the crimes committed recently in Kuwait and Nazi war crimes? Those that were committed in Kuwait are very fresh in the minds of the victims, whereas, in the case of those committed 50 years ago, identification is quite impossible.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my point. We know that many Nazi war criminals escaped by fleeing to various countries. If the people who committed atrocities in Kuwait in the last few weeks and months were to escape justice, and if, in years to come, they were to be

found in Britain or some other country, they ought to be brought to justice. The fact that justice was not done at the time is no reason for its not being done at all.

One thinks of the moors murders. Suppose that the people responsible for those crimes had not been brought to justice at the time. Would anyone argue that they should not now be brought to justice because too much time has elapsed? Consider the case of the Birmingham Six, who have now been found innocent. In November 1974, 21 people died in Birmingham as a result of the pub bombings. Many others were injured, and some were paralysed for life. Why should not the people actually responsible for that crime be brought to justice, after however long a period? It will soon be 17 years since that crime. However desirable it is that justice should be done at the earliest possible date, it is better that it should be done late than that it should not be done at all.

I should like to see established an international court, under the auspices of the United Nations, to deal with crimes such as we are debating today. Hon. Members may know that in the early 1950s the United Nations decided in favour of the creation of such a court. In view of the state of international affairs in those days—a situation that continued until recently—it is not surprising that agreement was not reached. I hope that, in the more relaxed international atmosphere of today, the United Nations will find it possible to agree to the creation of a court where such crimes could be tried. Several hon. Members have referred to other crimes committed during, and since the end of, the second world war—for example, those committed under Stalin. An international court such as I have in mind could be used to try such people.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) reiterated views with which we are familiar. He has been against this measure from the very beginning. He referred to crimes committed in Kuwait. If we had listened to his advice, those crimes would be going on right now, and would continue into the future. The fact that they have been brought to an end is due to the war and to the way in which the allies liberated Kuwait. As I have said from the very beginning, what happened in Kuwait was a just war, as the second world war was. Everything that has happened vindicates my views and the view of the large majority of hon. Members.

The right hon. Gentleman concluded his speech by talking about vengeance. I am certainly not interested in vengeance. I hope that I never have been, and I hope that no hon. Member is. It is said—whether it is true I do not know—that at one stage during the last war Winston Churchill suggested that a large number of Nazi officers and officials should simply be taken out after the war and shot. I do not think that there is any record of such remarks, but it is said that Churchill made them. Perhaps he changed his mind. Had such action been taken, I would have opposed it. That would have been vengeance. What I am interested in is justice and the rule of law. Summarily shooting people—whether criminals connected with the Nazi regime, or Saddam Hussein's thugs—is not the sort of action that I want to see taken. None the less, this measure, with all its limitations, and despite all the reservations about it, is one means of ensuring that justice will be done, however long the delay.

So long as I live, I shall remember not only what I have read and what I have heard from other people, but also the camps that I saw in a cinema newsreel in 1945. I know that several hon. and right hon. Members actually experienced the liberation of concentration camps. I was too young to be involved in that. I do remember, however, seeing film of the opening of Belsen and other extermination camps where monstrous crimes had been committed. Then there were the events such as those at Babi Yar, near Kiev, under Nazi occupation. Day by day, men, women and children were systematically slain. Does anyone suggest that because those crimes were committed so many years ago, at a time when the people concerned were not British citizens, the criminals should be allowed to go scot free? I cannot accept that—which is why I support the legislation.

7.8 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I have been deeply impressed by the speeches of the hon. Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I too do not seek vengeance: I seek justice.

I am a veteran of the second world war. During that war, I was conscious that we were fighting against something bestial and evil. The war crimes trials in Nuremberg proved that that was so. Not until 1986, when it was first alleged that Nazi war criminals were living in this country, was the spotlight turned on this aspect of the matter. We have come a long way since then.

In February 1988, the Hetherington-Chalmers inquiry was set up. At that time none of us could have imagined what would emerge—that living here in Britain, having secured the high privilege of British citizenship, were individuals against whom there was powerful evidence of involvement in the wholesale murder and manslaughter of innocent civilians.

There have been many references to what happened in the concentration camps. I have not seen the evidence, but I know what Nazi henchmen did in the occupied territories. They committed appalling and abominable crimes against defenceless citizens who were sometimes pushed into their own churches and burnt alive. I can think of scores of such cases that have been made known to me over the years.

Sir Thomas Hetherington, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, and Mr. William Chalmers, his Scottish equivalent, are very highly respected former prosecutors. They were the most experienced persons who could be found to assess the evidence and to apply the strict criteria that must be met before such evidence could be admitted into a British court. They produced two reports, the second of which, quite rightly, remains unpublished and locked away and contains the evidence available against a certain limited number of individuals.

Since the publication of the inquiry's report the Government have been consistently committed to war crimes legislation. I am glad that they are not wilting now. I congratulate them on reintroducing the measure so speedily. Successive Home Secretaries, supported by former Home Secretaries now on the Opposition Benches, have wholeheartedly supported the Bill. They have seen the unpublished report, and are among the Bill's most important proponents.

I fail to understand how, particularly during the Second Reading debate in the other place, some could argue that there was insufficient evidence. Had they, by some chance, seen the unpublished report? Were they unaware of the appalling behaviour of the Nazis and their henchmen during the second world war? Have they forgotten

[Sir Bernard Braine]

Oradour and Lidice and the thousands of other Oradours and Lidices that occurred across occupied Europe and the Soviet Union? Were they oblivious to what happened at Buchenwald, Auschwitz and Dachau and all the other abominable centres of human persecution that were wiped away as a result of Nazi defeat?

Far from having any wish for vengeance, I have been the chairman of the British-German parliamentary group for the past 30 years. Why?—because the first victims of the Nazis were the Germans themselves and because one of the greatest happenings in Europe since the war has been the way in which the German nation has purged itself of the Nazi past and governs itself in a democratic and sensible way.

There is no vengeance in my advocacy of the Bill, but —I hope that the Government will not wilt on this point —I demand justice. The matter is simple. Those who have been accorded the high privilege of British citizenship should not be excused the liabilities that go with it. I inform the faint hearts and the doubters that if a British subject allegedly committed murder overseas during that period he would be liable to prosecution. If we had known then what we now know, the persons concerned would never have been granted British citizenship. That is what lies at the heart of the Bill.

Earlier, it was asked why the legislation applies only to world war two. The answer is clear. It is because that is where the loophole exists. People who committed crimes after 1957 are already punishable under the Geneva Conventions Act 1957. Prosecutions for wilful killing and torture may take place in the United Kingdom wherever in the world the offence was committed and whatever the nationality of the alleged offender at the time. That is the answer. We are plugging a gap in our experience.

Some have argued that there would inevitably be show trials. Why should that be? The standards of evidence necessary for conviction would be the same as for other criminal trials in the United Kingdom. Witnesses are cross-examined, documentary evidence is subject to forensic testing, and experts are heard. One does not need to be a lawyer—it is a distinguished profession—to know that judges in this country can exclude any evidence if it appears that the accused has suffered prejudice from the circumstances in which that evidence was obtained. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) asked a perfectly legitimate question, and I can easily understand why he asked it. If an accused is unfit to mount a proper defence, and if the judge is not totally satisfied that the accused had every opportunity to defend himself, the case will not proceed. In short, anyone who believes that there will be show trials does not have a very high regard for the British system of justice.

What is the point of trials so long after the offences were committed? Again I refer to the point I made at the outset—justice. Is someone prepared to tell the family of the innocent bystander who was killed by the IRA last month at Victoria station that the perpetrators, if they are fortunate enough to escape capture for a certain period, will not be brought to justice for their crime? We have no time limit in this country for the prosecution of murder, and nor should we.

A 45-year lapse between crimes and their prosecution is in fact a period of borrowed time. It was time borrowed by the perpetrators of crime for the enjoyment of freedom, democratic rights, and for living under the rule of law, when all along justice had a prior claim. Indeed, such persons have enjoyed the very rights they denied to others. Borrowed time should count against the evader, not for him.

May I say something about the rejection of the Bill in the other place? It is a Government Bill, proceeding through Parliament in exclusively Government time. It was drawn up by the Home Office and presented to the House of Commons by the Home Secretary. The measure was confirmed in the Queen's Speech. Last year the Bill received large majorities in this House—the elected House. On Second Reading the margin was a substantial 213 votes. Members of this House are responsible to electorates. We must listen to our constituents and consider their interests before making any decision. Free votes are not taken lightly in this House. The other place should be made to understand that.

We must understand also that the crimes that we are considering were not committed in the heat of battle. I emphasise that. They are cases of the premeditated mass murder of men, women and children—often committed hundreds of miles from the war front. During the debate last year in the other House it was said that the crimes that we are considering were committed as acts of state and regarded by the Nazis as part of their war effort. With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall quote——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Harold Walker): Order.

Sir Bernard Braine: I shall be brief. I wish to quote Kitty Hart, a survivor of the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp and a witness in 1939 at the trial of Gottfried Weise in the High Court of Wuppertal, Germany.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Even the Father of the House must observe the rules that have been laid down by Mr. Speaker.

Sir Bernard Braine: I wholly agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

7.18 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make a speech. During the previous Second Reading debate I attempted to argue the case on the merits. I do not propose to repeat everything that I said then. It was not an easy speech to make, and I do not wish to make it again. It is in the *Official Report* for anyone who wishes to read it.

When we spend much of our time rightly talking about the victims of crime, we should not forget that there are still living victims of the crimes under discussion. They remember what happened. They have as much right to have those crimes dealt with in accordance with justice as has a victim of any other crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) spoke of difficulties for the defence in obtaining a fair procedure and fair acess to witnesses. He suggested that there may be what he caricatured as show trials and that justice could not be done to both sides. I say to my hon. Friend and others who share his doubts that justice can sometimes be a slow train comin'. Justice is not a train that runs to any timetable or even on a predictable track. However, it is a train that will

not be derailed if its destination is true. If it would be unjust for a court to proceed against a defendant—perhaps because the way in which the evidence had been assembled would put the defendant at a disadvantage or because he is so infirm that it would not be fair for him to stand trial—justice will not be derailed, because the judge will rightly say that it would not be fair for the trial to go ahead.

If, however, a defendant is fit to stand trial and the evidence has been properly assembled, it will be open to the defence to obtain the necessary evidence. That has been done. In two recent cases—the United States against Artishenko and United States against Kowalchuk—the defence counsel could obtain his evidence. In the first case, the defence counsel secured the evidence of six Soviet witnesses even though he requested it only on the day of travel to the Soviet Union. In the second case, Soviet witnesses provided exculpatory evidence for the defence. On the basis of that testimony, the United States justice department terminated proceedings against him. Those are just two examples of circumstances in which Soviet authorities co-operated with both sides. They are conscious of their position in the world and know that they must meet international standards of justice in these matters.

We discussed earlier the opinion of lawyers. I hope that most other practising lawyers have as high a regard as I have for the opinions expressed by their Lordships in the other place. Like all senior practising lawyers, I have a particular regard for the opinions of the Law Lords. However, they are not necessarily infallible; and they represent a small, although extremely distinguished, minority of lawyers in this country. Although they provide wise opinions on cases that are referred to them on appeal, by the nature of their position they are judges who have not heard cases at first instance for many years. With the greatest respect, they are perhaps not the best qualified people to judge how jurors, witnesses and lawyers react or how the atmosphere of the court is reactive today.

As I am conscious of varying opinions on the Bill, I have gone out of my way to find out what my legal colleagues think about it. I have spoken to many dozens of young lawyers throughout the country at various times. Some of them share the misgivings expressed by hon. Members, but the great majority of them—especially young lawyers whose strongly burning fire of an ideal of justice has not yet become case-hardened—believe that the Bill should proceed. They believe that, when one talks about show trials of war criminals, one is not talking about a case that is qualitatively different from, say, a celebrated murder trial. We have a free press and if they want to make a show of a case, it is up to them to do so. It is certainly not up to the House to stop them.

Most lawyers believe that the courts can exercise the necessary control, especially now that more safeguards are built into our judicial system than at the time of the Birmingham Six trial. That control can be effective in ensuring that justice is done. I have seen cases in which one would have thought that there would have been tremendous prejudice against the accused because of what they were alleged to have done, because of their colour or where they came from, or because they had allegedly committed a crime that was prevalent in an area to which they were strangers. Yet many of those cases resulted in acquittals. Juries are capable of fearsomely and fearlessly administering justice so that those who are not guilty are acquitted and those who are guilty, but against whom guilt cannot be proven beyond all reasonable doubt, are acquitted. I do not think for one moment that we have reason to doubt the ability of British juries to reach such just conclusions in war crimes trials.

7.25 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), to speak so soon after my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), who leads Back Benchers on human rights issues, and even to follow the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). The number of times that the hon. Member and I speak on common causes is becoming embarrassing. It is a pleasure to speak because I was getting fed up with hearing hon. Members on both sides of the House say that the crimes in question were the most heinous ever committed in the history of the world but that we should do nothing about bringing to justice those who committed them.

Two weeks ago I went to Majdanek. The fact that so few people remember Majdanek is one reason for introducing the Bill. It was a concentration and extermination camp just outside Lublin, about two hours drive from Warsaw. It is not remembered because fewer people died there than in Auschwitz, a little further down the road. However, 360,000 people perished in Majdanek between 1941 and 1944. One can go into the huts crammed with victims' clothes—one of the huts has children's clothes piled from the ground to the roof. One can see the showers into which they were told they were going to be cleansed five minutes before they were put into the gas chamber next door. One can also see the empty cyclon B containers that killed, in 15 minutes, the women and children, the weak and the old who could not work. There are also containers of carbon monoxide—there was insufficient cyclon B—which took 45 minutes to asphyxiate the innocent. I walked around Majdanek practically alone two Saturdays ago and saw the trenches that had been dug. In one day, someone gave the order to shoot 18,400 Jews as they stepped off the backs of lorries, and they fell into the graves that had been dug for them. In one day, 18,400 people were systematically shot on the orders of a human being.

Therefore, when somebody asks whether the perpetrators of such heinous crimes should be excluded from justice because they have taken advantage of a loophole in the legal machinery that we were supposed to provide but did not provide, what am I to say? What would anyone who went round Majdanek, or anywhere else that such crimes were perpetrated, say if they knew that the people who ordered them and were responsible for them were alive today and sheltering in this country because there was a defect in our legal machinery?

I shall try to deal with two points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). He said that bringing back the Bill was an abuse of the Parliament Acts because it could have been amended; but if he had listened to the debates in the House of Lords he would realise that it was clear that they did not want an amendment: they did not want the Bill. The Bill could not have been amended as they wanted because that would have destroyed it. This is precisely when the Parliament Acts should be invoked because what was

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

being said in the Lords was totally different from the view repeatedly expressed by the overwhelming majority of the elected representatives of this House.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham said that he wanted to know why the Government knew better than the distinguished lawyers who made the speeches in the House of Lords. Not all distinguished lawyers are opposed to the legislation. If Lord Elwyn-Jones, the former Lord Chancellor, had lived, he would have spoken in favour of the Bill. Unfortunately, he died on the day it was debated.

Their Lordships expressed much emotion because they were closely connected with the events at the end of the war. They were involved for different reasons—perhaps they were in the Government who allowed the war criminals into this country, knowingly or unknowingly; perhaps they knew of the loophole and did nothing to close it; perhaps they were responsible for, or were a party to, letting the Cossacks go back to the Soviet Union where they died and so felt guilty; perhaps they believed that more anti-Semitism would be stirred up if the Bill were enacted; perhaps they fought valiantly in the war and were sick to death of everything to do with it and so did not want to go through the horror again. Whatever the reason, their Lordships were too closely involved with events immediately following the war. Sometimes people who are too closely involved are not the best ones to make judgments. That is not to say that their Lordships' speeches were not worthwhile, should not be listened to or examined. They are listened to and have to be examined as to the viability of their arguments.

Some of their Lordships said that the Bill was retrospective legislation. It may be, but that is not of itself a reason for not having such legislation. Such legislation is bad, evil and not to be countenanced when it makes something a crime today that was not a crime when it was perpetrated. It is for that reason, and no other, that retrospective legislation is wrong. When the crimes were perpetrated, those who shot the 18,400 people or gave the order or gassed or hanged or burned or flogged to death or drowned the people in Majdanek could not have been in any doubt that what they were doing was a crime against the world order and the law of every civilised country. It might be time to "throw in the sponge" if the crimes had not been so heinous—shoplifting or, perhaps, one murder—but we are talking about mass murder and genocide. Perhaps the Bill should be extended to other war crimes, but that is no reason not to introduce the Bill in its more limited form.

There are doubts about the procedures and identification, but Sir Thomas Hetherington made it clear publicly that the identification issue will not often arise. In many of the cases that he considered there was no dispute about identification—the dispute involved what was done. There have been objections that there will be no committal proceedings, but they are not held when a voluntary bill of indictment is introduced or in fraud cases, because we changed the law to get rid of committal proceedings. Live television from abroad was introduced in this House under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and is being extended to Scotland. Statements of the dead are admissible in our courts, provided that the judge thinks that justice is being done. The judge provides the protection and has overall responsibility to ensure that justice, not injustice, is done. Whether prosecutions will or will not be possible is not a matter for us. We are talking about the machinery that gives the Director of Public Prosecutions the opportunity to say that there is sufficient evidence for the case to go forward, for a judge to ensure that justice is done and for a jury to decide whether a defendant is innocent or guilty. All we are being asked to do is to fill the gap in the legal

It has been asked why no action has been taken under international law. It was because we are now a party to the Genocide Act 1969, which is as retrospective as anything could be—it is specifically retrospective but it does not cover the war crimes of the second world war. The "violation of the principle of British justice" has been mentioned, but the principle of British justice is that justice be done, the wrongdoer be caught and sentenced, there is no time limit on murder, still less on mass murder and everyone should receive a fair trial.

That is British justice. British justice demands that the perpetrators of these crimes should be brought to justice. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on bringing the Bill again before the House.

7.37 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I greatly appreciated the sentiments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) when he said that he would not presume to give advice to any of his colleagues. However, I am conscious of walking on eggshells. I simply say for the benefit of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that I have been to the holocaust museum in Jerusalem recently. I did national service in an armoured regiment, and when we fired guns on the Höhne ranges, the commander made all national service men go to Belsen; Colonel Douglas Stewart was right to insist on that.

I should like to talk quietly to the Home Secretary and I hope that he will forgive me if I do so in terms of my constituency. The first Polish armoured division came to West Lothian—to Fife and the west of Edinburgh—during the war. As the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) knows, and as was outlined in the Hetherington-Chalmers report, many of the Polish service men said, for self-evident reasons, that they could not return immediately after the war. Those Polish people have, by their vigour and intelligence, greatly enhanced the life of my constituency and its surrounding constituencies.

When I was a teacher I taught many of the first generation. Those children, including the Nawrockas, were bright and vigorous. I was greatly influenced by a man called Stefan Haluch, who was later to be a headmaster in one of the West Lothian schools and whose brother was, like many others, massacred with the Polish officer corps at Katyn. For many years it was said that the Germans were responsible for that massacre in the forest. Now, we know differently; it was as Mr. Haluch always told me. From that experience I have concluded that we had better be careful about trying to sort out blame, even after 20 years, let alone 50.

The formidable nature of the task is referred to in the report, paragraph 8.26, the issue of the Cyrillic alphabet, and identifying precisely who was whom. The problem of identification to which Hetherington and Chalmers referred is formidable.

I also wish to put it on record that, as a Scottish Member of Parliament, in one particular case, I had a great deal to do with William Chalmers who was the deputy Crown Agent. In my opinion, he is a man of considerable seriousness and quality of mind whom I greatly respect.

I shall continue to be rather anecdotal. When I was a very new Member of Parliament, I was invited to a Latvian wedding in the village of Stoneyburn in my constituency. It was a lovely occasion, but late into the night many things came out into the open which left an indelible impression on me, especially the number of relatives of the families who had been killed not by the Germans—we have to face that—but by the Russians. Subsequently, it has become only too clear that the British agents who landed on the Latvian coast—the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) may know exactly what I am talking about, because Philby and others may have been involved, but I must not pursue that idea—bumped off the Latvian people, often family by family. That caused great suspicion and resentment. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is right to say that that is covered in the report.

I remember that as a young Member of Parliament I sat late into the night at that wedding in my kilt. I was told that I should be very careful of one Latvian immigrant because his background was terrible. I asked his name—it was Hamish Mackenzie. I do not think that his name in Latvia was Hamish Mackenzie. There is a problem of identification—it is bad enough after 20 years, but after half a century the practical difficulties are formidable.

I admit that I was greatly influenced by the speeches made in another place, especially that by Lord Goodman. I wish to ask the Home Secretary whether he is worried by an element of what I believe Goering called "victor's justice". That is always a problem. We cannot pretend that all the injustices have been on one side, as I have tried to outline with reference to the Germans and the Russians. I ask the Minister to comment on what can be encapsulated as the problem of victor's justice.

Time is short, but I should like to comment on one other matter. It is incredible that the House should spend six hours of prime time discussing this issue when the Government have found no time since the third week in January to discuss the urgent problems of the Gulf.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Thirteen million Jews died.

Mr. Dalyell: I understand that, but the here and now is rather more urgent for today's debate. We should be discussing who decided to bomb the road to Basra, what we are going to do about the continuing crimes of Saddam Hussein in Kerbala and elsewhere in southern Iraq, what our relations should be with the Shi'ites in the south and with the Kurds in the north, who are in the middle of what seems to be a bloody and open war. I am the last to complain because I was lucky in the ballot on Friday, but let us make no mistake—it should not be left to private Members' time to discuss the health hazards of cholera, typhoid and hepatitis, which will become more acute as the cool spring develops into a scorching summer. We should be discussing what on earth to do about the oil slicks and, above all, about the oil fires. Those issues are more urgent for six hours of prime time——

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to speak about the immediate problems of Northern Ireland, but I do not see what they have to do with the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Although we have a wide ranging debate on Second Reading, it is not as wide ranging as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is trying to make it.

Mr. Dalyell: I bow to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is arguable whether we should be discussing war crimes committed by all sorts of people rather than events that took place before any of the party leaders were born. We are in danger of being highly selective about this issue. Why go back to Latvia and Lithuania? In answer to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), it strikes some of us that, as the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, we are dealing with some rather lowly people. No one is suggesting that the major decision-makers are the objects of the present debate.

7.46 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I wish that this problem had never arisen. I wish that our predecessors had not allowed to exist the conditions which permitted these people to slip into this country. I almost wish that these people had never been identified. However, they have been identified and we cannot leave it at that.

Britain's reputation for justice and the honour of this country depend on the Bill being passed. The House is being asked simply to allow that jurisdiction be granted over all current British residents to cover crimes that were then and are now breaches of international law. It is not being asked to act as judge or jury or even as prosecutor. It is being asked to allow a legislative loophole that relates solely to jurisdiction to be corrected and to allow British justice to prevail. Prosecution is and will be—quite rightly—a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions. Judgment is and will be a matter for the courts. In an individual case, either or both may conclude that a conviction cannot or should not be achieved, but that is a matter for them, not for the House.

Why should not we sweep the problem under the carpet? Why should not we—as some hon. Members suggested earlier—let bygones be bygones? The answer was given by our erstwhile colleague Lord Waddington who, as Home Secretary, said on Second Reading last year:

"sometimes one is brought face to face with facts that cannot be buried, with deeds so terrible that they cannot be forgotten, and as long as one of those responsible survives, the world will cry out for justice."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 896.]

What brought him face to face with such facts, especially as he was, as an eminent Queen's counsel, initially sceptical about all this? Unlike us, he has read part two of the Hetherington-Chalmers report which contains the detailed evidence on many of the cases concerned. Is not it ironic that that part remains confidential—so we cannot see it—to safeguard the entitlement of the accused to a fair trial, which their victims never had?

I declare an interest. My father was a Dutch refugee who fled to this country in 1940. When he returned to his native Holland in 1945, he found that 52 of his relatives were missing. They had been torn from their homes and loaded on to trains. Men, women, children and infants in

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

arms went eastward to the death camps and never returned. My father believed in many of the great qualities of this nation and he believed especially in British justice. I hope that this House, the representative assembly of the British nation, will pass the Bill and let justice be done.

7.50 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Many arguments have been put in favour of the Bill tonight and I will not detain the House by repeating them. Let me for a moment take the House back to the time when the dark clouds of war were gathering across Europe and to a time when thousands feared a knock on the door, which could mean that they would be dragged out of their homes, that their weeping children would be torn from their arms and that wives would be separated from husbands to be herded like cattle into trucks, to be beaten, starved and humiliated and to end their days in the horrors of the concentration camps.

Are we, who, in those dark days, stood virtually alone against the evils of Adolf Hitler and all that he stood for, to condone by our inaction the crimes committed by those who enacted those murderous deeds? What is our answer to the defenceless, innocent people who suffered so much and who were deserted by so many who did not hear their cries or who turned their faces away from the suffering? Are we, who speak for the British people, to allow those evil men to remain safe in our country in the knowledge that as long as they live within our shores the law can never touch them? Are we to allow this country to continue to remain a haven for those criminals? If those murderers had been born British, they could have been tried under our present law, but because they have become British citizens or have settled in this country since the war, as the law now stands, they cannot be prosecuted. Should not all who live in this country be covered by the same laws? I believe that they should be, and that is one of the many reasons why I will vote for the Bill.

The Bill may not lead to the single prosecution of a war criminal who resides in this country, but at least it will give those criminals the bitter taste of fear that one day someone may knock at their door and take them away to answer for the suffering and misery they inflicted on so many innocent men, women and children.

7.52 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I am dismayed that the Bill should once again be brought before us. As the noble Lord Hailsham said recently:

"our objections to it are ones of principle. It is retrospective, discriminatory and it will be impossible to guarantee a fair defence. It is a thoroughly bad Bill."

I am rather surprised that the Government brought back the Bill, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister voted against its introduction on our first vote of principle. Such post hoc legislation does Parliament no good. It is wrong to alter the general law for special cases. If the Bill were passed, it would cause enormous legal problems. There would be a change in the way in which the law of evidence is presented and there would be huge difficulties over identification after such a long time.

We all know and understand how appallingly heinous the misdeeds were, but that does not mean that we have to alter the laws of England. The Bill is all about special cases. It is narrow in scope and deals only with alleged war crimes in Germany or in German-occupied territory which took place between certain dates. It does not deal, for example, with war crimes committed elsewhere or with crimes committed since 5 June 1945.

The Bill has never been adopted as official Conservative party policy in any manifesto that I have seen and it has not been put to the nation in a general election. I have not had a single letter in support of the Bill and no one seems interested in it.

I am also dismayed and surprised that a Tory Government—I hope that the Home Secretary will listen to this—should seek to pass such an odd law by resorting to the Parliament Acts, which were passed by a Liberal Administration and then by a Labour Government after the war. I thought that the Tory party believed in a second Chamber and that it supported the House of Lords. The debates in the other place were of a high order and many men of wisdom, experience and knowledge of the law expressed powerful objections to the Bill. This House has neither the expertise nor the experience to challenge the views so powerfully presented in another place. We are not a complete democracy in this country. We have the Crown, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Who are we in this special and difficult moral case to say that we are above everyone else and that what we do must become law?

What would the great Tory leaders of the past have thought of such behaviour by this Conservative Government? If the Bill is eventually passed, thanks to the Parliament Acts, I shall bow my head in shame. Have we in this House become so craven that we are prepared to give way to a well-organised lobby and to special pleading? Have we no sense of honour left? If the Bill is passed, it will be a sad day for the laws of England.

I am one of the few in this debate who served in the forces throughout the second world war. I hope that I have no bitterness against our former enemies. I have often said that I greatly admired—and admire—the German army. Years ago, Lord Randolph Churchill described Mr. Gladstone as

"an old man in a hurry".

Perhaps I may be allowed to say on this occasion, with regard to this extraordinary Bill, that the measure is being pressed on us by young men in a hurry. If the Bill becomes law, they will in time very much regret what they are doing.

7.57 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): It is sometimes sad when people who seek only justice for all are told that they are part of a tradition that has gone and that they are

"young men in a hurry".

I am glad that I am young and I do not think that I am in a hurry.

Mr. Rees: Relatively.

Mr. Bermingham: All things are relative.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am 65 and I am young.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has a problem.

What are we talking about in the Bill? We are talking, as was said earlier, about murdered children, and about men and women who committed crimes that none of us can bear or tolerate. By some quirk of law, they were never

brought to justice. Is it wrong for the House to say that we think that all citizens of the world are equal before the law? That is all we are saying. We are not saying anything novel.

My predecessor bar one as Member of Parliament for St. Helens was Lord Shawcross, who prosecuted at Nuremberg. He said recently that he thought that time had gone and that time had somehow forgiven and forgotten. That must be wrong. If I murder somebody today and, by a quirk of fate, avoid prosecution for 20, 30 or 40 years, have I committed any less of a crime after, say, 40 years? Have I somehow, by the passage of time, gained the right not to be prosecuted? We do not have a statute of limitations in this land. Why should we have a statute of limitations for war criminals? We should not, we must not, and I suspect that, after tonight, we will not.

As time goes by, perhaps education improves and we learn how to deal with the sins of the past. Perhaps we should always deal with the sins of the past, but why? In other lands, people can be prosecuted for war crimes committed in Europe. The Bill is too limited because it restricts prosecution to crimes committed in German-occupied territories from 1939 onwards. War crimes are being committed in the name of inhumanity all over the world, all the time——

Mr. Allason: There is a law to cover that.

Mr. Bermingham: Of course there is not. The hon. Gentleman should look at the legislation——

Mr. Allason: What about the 1956 and 1969 Acts?

Mr. Bermingham: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. If he wants to intervene, I shall certainly give way to him. By seeking to intervene from a sedentary position, he is perhaps showing the paucity of his cause.

Mr. Allason: Is it not the case that the Geneva Conventions Act 1956 and the Genocide Act 1969 make clear the international law and the law of this country on this issue? Is it not the case that the Bill tackles a small loophole in the jurisdiction, which it aims to close because it is exploited by war criminals?

Mr. Bermingham: If I remember correctly, the Geneva Conventions Act gained Royal Assent in 1957, not 1956 —but it matters not.

The Bill seeks to plug the loophole for the period 1939-57. Is that wrong? Are we to pass the Billl simply because we wish to close the gap?

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Retrospectively.

Mr. Bermingham: Another Conservative Member intervenes from a sedentary position to say, "retrospectively". Murder is murder whether it was committed in 1940 or 1941. There is nothing about retrospective legislation in the Bill. We are not turning what was a legitimate act into an illegitimate act. Quite the contrary —we are saying that what was done in the period from 1939 onwards was illegitimate and illegal. It was murder —it is as blunt as that. If hon. Members say, "We shall use the argument of retrospection as a means of excusing the prosecution of killers", I ask them why there should be a rule for some people in the European continent which does not apply to other people in the European continent. Just because by a quirk of fate and legislation someone moves from, for example, the Ukraine or Latvia to the United Kingdom, why should he or she escape prosecution when, if that person were to stay in the first country, he or she would face prosecution? That must be wrong.

It is also argued that, because another place argued so eloquently against the Bill, we who are elected by the people have no right to challenge that view. I thought that was what the civil war was all about, back in 1640. I thought that we had solved that problem and decided that the elected House has the right, on certain occasions, to say, "No, we reflect the will of the people, the will of the electorate, and our view must prevail."

The Parliament Acts have been used on only three occasions on major matters—and this is a major matter. If, by luck, someone has left the place in Europe where he or she committed a crime and has taken up residence here and therefore has not been prosecuted, we must say on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom, "That is not good enough."

The tragedy is that we did not have the courage to introduce such legislation 20, 30 or 40 years ago to bring our law into line with the European continent. That is why I ask the House to support the Bill.

Since our previous debate on this matter, I have considered the arguments about identification with great care. As a practising lawyer—I declare that interest—I have always been worried about identification cases because there have been many miscarriages of justice as a result of misidentification. I listened with care to what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said earlier, but disagree fundamentally with him. Identification need not be simply a line-up in an identification parade. We have sophisticated techniques that could be used in this case. Provided that we have the safeguards which, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said, are safeguards with which the English courts are well used to dealing—I concede that we do not always get it right—I do not foresee problems with identification.

That was the problem that worried me greatly last time. I have thought about it a great deal since, because it was always apparent that the Bill would return to this House and that this issue would not go away. I therefore asked myself a simple question. If I were a member of the investigating team, would I be satisfied that suitable safeguards could be built into the system to ensure that any identification, if it forms a major part of the case, could be safely relied upon? The provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 crossed my mind and I wondered whether they were enough in themselves.

However, there are records of what happened. There is record on film and there are photographs. There are hundreds of pieces of documentary evidence and there are forensic and other experts who can interpret the films and decide who the people were. I believe that we now have the scientific knowledge to help us with the problem of the aging process. After all, most of us go through it in one form or another as the years go by. I am no longer so worried, therefore, about the identification problem. If any trials involve identification, we must consider making available to the defence the same wide range of forensic skills and experts as are available to the prosecution. That is the one remaining area that causes me a niggling worry, but I believe that it can be overcome.

When people kill, they take the life of another. The millions who were killed did not ask to die. They are the victims. Is it not time that we in this House thought more

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about the victims than about the aggressors? Have not the victims of the holocaust a right to justice no matter how much time has elapsed? Why should those who committed the crimes and who, by a quirk of law, were lucky enough to escape the justice that should have been due to their victims escape it still? Why should those victims continue to be denied their justice? After all, they gave their lives. Those whom we now seek to prosecute took those lives.

8.8 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): As a member of the all-party war crimes group, I attended the debate in the other House. I was pretty stunned by what I heard there. There seems to be a tendency in this House to assume some kind of monopoly of wisdom for some of their Lordships, especially Lord Goodman. From my experience, receiving letters which have threatened all kinds of things, Lord Goodman is just a large, big bully and I do not believe that he speaks for anybody and I do not suppose——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is contrary to our conventions to criticise in that fashion members of the other place, who cannot answer back.

Mr. Allason: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling into question the integrity of a member of the legal profession.

When I listened to their Lordships, I noted that they pursued three particular red herrings on which I should like to take them to task. First, the essence of the Bill is a technical change in jurisdiction, rather than the criminal law—or specifically the criminal law relating to murder. When the people committed the offences, they were outside our jurisdiction. They have remained outside that jurisdiction through a loophole in the law. We do not seek to criminalise what they did, but merely to extend the jurisdiction. The unpalatable fact that their Lordships were not prepared to face was that the United Kingdom has become a bolthole for war criminals. Indeed, only one other place in the world offers the same measure of protection to these people and that is Damascus.

Mr. John Browne: My hon. Friend's argument is not quite right. We are seeking to extend the jurisdiction. I believe that that is right and I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) said. But in this case we are seeking to extend the jurisdiction retrospectively. That is the crucial issue.

Mr. Allason: If my hon. Friend will give me a moment, I shall come to that point. It was one of the more bogus points raised in another place.

It is not a matter of reviving old memories. The individuals are known. There are no difficulties over identification. They know who they are and, of course, their names have already been published on Scottish Television. Those two issues are complete red herrings.

I now come to the business of retrospective legislation. I have rarely heard such utter rot from the other House. We constantly pass retrospective legislation. If anyone challenges that, I simply refer them to the Official Secrets Act 1989, in which we created a new offence. Anyone who has ever served in the security and intelligence services at any time has suddenly been drawn into a brand new Act. They did not sign anything relating to the Act. They may have served long before the last world war. The creation of that offence was entirely a retrospective exercise. That the Bill is retrospective does not automatically mean that it is bad. In this case, retrospectively to extend the jurisdiction of the House seems perfectly satisfactory.

The third issue that their Lordships appeared to ignore was the whole business of the time limit. It was suggested that, because the events happened an awful long time ago, somehow those responsible should be excused. I am prepared to listen to that line of argument, but there is one logical question to be asked. If one gets away with a murder, at what stage can one stop looking over one's shoulder wondering whether one is going to be arrested? Is it 10, 20 or 40 years? That logical question must be asked of their Lordships. They were not prepared to answer it in the debate. All that they said was that it was an awfully long time ago and it was a great shame to dredge it all up again.

Mention was made of defendants being feeble and senile. Of course, that is not the point. The legislation will allow our legal system to address a particular problem presented by individuals who have sought asylum in this country. We shall not automatically prosecute such individuals. If they are not in any condition to stand trial, of course the judge will sling the case out immediately.

I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) is not in the Chamber. He raised several issues which, again, were red herrings that must be addressed. He wondered why these people had come to this country. More to the point, he said that the British authorities were aware of the background of those individuals when they entered the country. That is a grave allegation. I simply do not believe that that is the case. But if my right hon. Friend persists in making that allegation, there is no clearer argument for ending the secrecy that surrounds all the cases.

I hark back to one of the first questions that I asked in the House. I asked whether it was possible to see the British files—admittedly in Foreign Office archives—relating to Klaus Barbie. I was told that because the British Government had employed Klaus Barbie in an intelligence capacity after the war, the information was too terribly secret to be revealed. What could be more preposterous?

I hope that the House will support the Bill. Moreover, if, sadly, the Bill is rejected, I urge the authorities and Sir Thomas Hetherington to publish part two of the report to demonstrate to all hon. Members exactly how overwhelming is the weight of evidence against these individuals. I urge the House to support the Bill.

8.15 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The point that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) has just made about the information available in part two of the Chalmers-Hetherington report is extremely important. I shall return to it later, if only to argue that, at present, the information is in the hands of the Home Office. Only the Home Secretary and his closest advisers have seen it. I believe that, if the Bill is not passed, that information will not remain secret. Several people who supplied it will make sure that it is made known. That is a factor which we should take into account because it has greatly influenced successive Home Secretaries who have read the report. As is said in the report, the information is horrific. I have

always felt that that is what influenced the Government and what may well have influenced the new Prime Minister, who previously voted against the Bill.

I support the Bill as chairman of the all-party war crimes committee and for myself. Over the weekend, I re-read our debates in the House over the past two years and the White Paper by Hetherington and Chalmers. I have read the papers that were prepared for the use of the war crimes committee, some of them by eminent lawyers explaining—with the aid of the Home Office, I am glad to say, which certainly did not approach our endeavours secretively—why the other approaches, of extradition or altering citizenship, were not the correct avenues to pursue. I must say that the citizenship avenue attracted me at the beginning.

It is good training and concentrates the mind to read the explanatory and financial memorandum, which encapsulates the purpose of the Bill. It says that clause 1 provides that:

"proceedings for murder and manslaughter (or culpable homicide) may be brought against persons who are British citizens or resident in the United Kingdom or the Islands in respect of actions committed in violation of the laws and customs of war in Germany or German-occupied territory between 1 September 1939 and 5 June 1945."

I have had letters asking why Japanese and Russian war crimes have not been included. It is because the Home Office, in its wisdom, with the information available to it, said that it did not know of any Russians or Japanese people who came here to live. Large numbers of people came here from eastern Europe as displaced persons, as is set out in the Hetherington-Chalmers report. The Bill was spawned out of that report.

Referring to a draft convention to which the United Kingdom might have become a signatory and quoting Home Office papers in 1944, the report stated:

"The United Kingdom need not sign this convention because there is little or no likelihood of 'War Criminals' or 'Quislings' escaping to this country since for no doubt many years after the war all persons coming here from abroad will require a visa".

In 1944, in its wisdom, the Home Office thought that there was "little or no likelihood" of people with war crime backgrounds coming from mid-Europe to this country, so there was no need to sign the convention. The Home Office was wrong.

For economic reasons, because of work in the textile industry in the north or in the coal mines in south Wales, large numbers of people were brought to the United Kingdom. I invite right hon. and hon. Members to read page 42 of the Hetherington-Chalmers report, which states:

"the existing screening arrangements . . . were as good as could be devised".

A large number of people came to this country for economic reasons. Some had been involved in the commission of war crimes in mid and central Europe. That is the genesis of the Bill.

I am as worried as anyone about the practicalities of any trials. Although I was only marginally involved in the Birmingham case, I was heavily involved in the Guildford case. I am glad that the Government have said that a royal commission will investigate the criminal justice system. It is necessary to investigate the police and forensic evidence. I am sure that the Home Secretary will deal with those matters in the short term, but the problem associated with the Court of Appeal will not be dealt with overnight. The more I become involved and the more I prepare evidence for the royal commission—which I was preparing for the May investigation—the more I realise that this is not an easy matter. There are problems in terms of the practicalities of the court.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) referred, in a way that I could not, to the way in which courts deal with jurors and witnesses and identification. I am glad that lawyers in another place said that they were concerned about fair trials, but I wish that there had been equal concern about fair trials for those involved in the Guildford case, for example. I hope that there will be a fair trial for anyone who is dealt with under the Bill.

It is 17 years since the Birmingham case was first brought up. It may be another 20 years before those who committed those horrors in 1974 are caught. Should we therefore argue that, as nearly 40 years have passed since a crime was committed, it should be forgotten?

Mr. Gorst: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree, in relation to much of what he said about the Birmingham and Guildford cases, that what happens depends on the quality of the investigators?

Mr. Rees: I agree. That was to be my next point. Once the Bill is passed, investigation will determine the nature of a trial. I have some sympathy with those members of the judiciary who say that they take what comes in front of them. Investigation is very important.

My experience partly explains why I became involved in the war crimes issue. I saw the evidence of war crimes in Lyons in France, the town where Barbie operated, but I do not want to develop that point. I have never forgotten what I saw. Those were not crimes committed in the heat of battle. I have often argued with members of my family, who have now grown up, about how to distinguish between Dresden, the cab-rank operations in which I was involved and the events on the Basra road. When I took my children to France, I saw acre upon acre of graves of the millions of German, French, British and Irish people who died in the first world war——

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): And Scots.

Mr. Rees: And Scots. I am not making a silly point. There were large numbers of people from all parts of Europe. The whole thing is an obscenity. The real war crimes involve those who committed the crimes in the cool light of day. Some of the stories told in the Hetherington report reflect the horrifying events.

As a young man, I was astonished to find that the young soldiers who were taken prisoner in the south of France were, we were told, Russians—they were Ukrainians. I do not know whether Germans or Ukrainians committed the crimes in Lyons. The same things happened in Yugoslavia and in Austria-Hungary. Thousands of people poured in. We now read that they were enthusiastically on the side of the Germans. That is as may be—I am not concerned with that after all this time.

What is a war crime? In much of the debate, we have gone beyond the Bill. The Hetherington report states:

"It is . . . appropriate to consider . . . the terms 'war crime' and 'war criminal' . . . Most of what are termed 'war crimes' in the Second World War were committed far from the front

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line and have little to do with the actual waging of war. Most of these crimes would be more appropriately termed crimes of occupation".

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), who served with the Fleet Air Arm during the war, and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) expressed a view which I understood. Those who have seen war realise how horrific it is and pull back from considering war crimes. I do not pull back from war crimes but am concerned with the horrors that took place in mid-Europe in the cool of the day—not the heat of battle—when thousands of people were done to death for anti-socialism.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: That is all right.

Mr. Rees: I am proud to be a socialist. This is not something to be funny about. Good socialists were done to death by communists in central Europe. They had stood up for their cause throughout the war. It is interesting to note who supported the communists when the war was over—many were slightly to the right of Genghis Khan. They had a home in the communist party. There is a certain circularity in this matter, fascism and communism becoming very much the same. A socialist understands that.

"War crime" is defined in the Hetherington report. What did Governments do in the 1940s? I referred to the Home Office statement in 1944, that quislings and people who committed war crimes would not come to the United Kingdom, but the Home Office was wrong. Many of us get things wrong because we do not comprehend what will happen. The Hetherington report stated:

"War criminals were not given an assurance that they would not be prosecuted here, and we see nothing in the policy or practice of successive British Governments that would prevent the present Government taking whatever action it considers suitable."

Similarly, on retrospection, the report stated that

"enactment of legislation in this country to allow the prosecution of 'war crimes' in British courts would not be retrospective: it would merely empower British courts to utilise a jurisdiction already available to them under international law since before 1939, over crimes which had been internationally recognised as such since 1939 by nations including both the United Kingdom and Germany."

The report adds that that argument is not made in respect of offences of genocide, which would be retrospective, and which were not attended to until the 1957 legislation.

I comprehend the need for legislation as a matter of principle. The principle involved was that cited earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). The Bill really exists to plug a defect in our nationality laws. If I, who was British born, had committed such a crime, I would be brought to trial, but the man or woman living next door to me who did not tell the truth when they were made British citizens or when they completed the forms to enter this country as displaced persons would not be prosecuted.

Ms. Short: As my right hon. Friend knows, if someone lies for the purpose of acquiring British citizenship, they can subsequently be deprived of it. It is not true to say that the Bill provides the only remedy against a liar who wrongly secured British citizenship.

Mr. Rees: No, but I said earlier, when my hon. Friend was temporarily absent for a spot of dinner—understandably, because she has been present in the Chamber all evening—that that point had been made in the Select Committee and was put to the Home Office. It is not just a matter of depriving a person of his British citizenship. It is not—as I know, as a former Home Secretary—just a matter of making an executive decision, because the case will end up in the courts. My hon. Friend may be concerned about *The Sun* splashing a particular case over its first and second pages. It would do the same if British citizenship was rescinded, because the case could end up in the courts. There is no way of avoiding court action.

Ms. Short: But it is not the only remedy.

Mr. Rees: No, it is not the only remedy. That point is made in the Hetherington report, as it was in the report published by the appropriate Home Office department some time ago.

Mr. John Browne: The right hon. Gentleman makes an eloquent argument for plugging the gap, with which most right hon. and hon. Members would agree. The question is whether that gap should be plugged retrospectively. It may be convenient and popular to take that action, but would it be just?

Mr. Rees: I quoted earlier the advice offered by Hetherington and Chalmers. One is a former Director of Public Prosecutions and the other held a similar appointment in Scotland, as Crown Agent. They argued that it is not a case of retrospection in relation to the crime itself, but to the jurisdiction.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the inception of the idea embodied in the Bill was a merciful alternative to extradition?

Mr. Rees: Replying earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), I said that we had considered the option relating to citizenship, which appealed to me. I wish that we could get around the problem of citizenship in this country, but we are haunted by nationality and British subject status, going back to the days of a British empire on which the sun never set. As to extradition, one thinks of the days to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) referred, when we were both students. I wonder whether he sat in the Strangers' Gallery when the House debated a famous extradition case involving a Pole, which featured in all the newspapers. Extradition was found to be not as easy as all that.

Mr. Stanbrook: I imagine that the right hon. Gentleman is thinking of the Batory case.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Extradition does not provide an easy solution either. The Government came down on this side——

Mr. Archer: The objection came from them.

Mr. Rees: My right hon. and learned Friend says that the objection came from "them". I take his words in the way that he put them.

Plugging the gap of citizenship and of nationality is of the greatest importance. I am old enough to recall that, even in the first year or two of the second world war, many people on the right ignored the reality of Hitler. It was a

long time before the reality of the concentration camps was accepted. Equally, after the war, many on the left ignored the reality of Soviet Russia. We are back to the circularity that I mentioned earlier—the way in which intelligent men and women can close their eyes and ears to the reality of the world, which is extremely surprising.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I recall that a command paper published in 1939 set out all the atrocities that had been committed. I obtained a copy from the Library.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman is right. I had other things on my mind at the time, but I imagine that many people chose to ignore those facts. Ignoring reality is not a function of academic attainment either.

There is no reason why those who live here as citizens or residents should be treated any differently from the rest of us. I keep saying that I have been a Member of the House for a long time, but it is germane. I have never quite faced up to being a politician, because politicians are great ones for shouting and attracting the attention of the national media when something happens to get coverage of what they intend to do. Not long ago, right hon. and hon. Members were denouncing the way in which RAF pilots were being treated as prisoners of war and saying what they intended to do about it. I will tell the House what will be done about it—nothing. It was good stuff at the time.

I mentioned that because I have been in correspondence with Wing Commander Stapleton as a result of a letter that he wrote to *The Times*. He pointed out that, in June 1944, following the Gestapo murders of 50 allied air crew officers, the Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, assured Parliament that the Government were firmly resolved

"that these foul criminals shall be tracked down to the last man wherever they may take refuge. When the war is over they will be brought to exemplary justice."—[*Official Report*, 23 June 1944; Vol. 401, c. 481.]

What was done? They were forgotten. It is easy to forget, but I do not want to forget those who came here to live as British citizens. If they had gone to another country, it would be someone else's responsibility, but as they came here to reside, they are our responsibility.

I commend the Bill to the House, on the basis of both parts of the Hetherington and Chalmers report. I do not believe that the second part will go away. It has affected successive Home Secretaries, and in my view it affected the Prime Minister and led to his change of mind. If the Bill does not die a natural death, I do not believe that many people will be touched by it—and I do not want them to go to prison, to be hanged, or locked up. They will be old men of my age, and older. I want them to face the light of day. In some small way, that will show others that there is no hiding place for those who commit the kind of war crimes that have been listed by Hetherington and Chalmers. If we do not take that action, someone else will, because although that information is privy to the Government—as long as they want to keep it—others provided it, and it will be provided. I would rather that the press dealt with a trial, instead of the untested evidence in part two of the Hetherington-Chalmers report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I see that five hon. Members seek to catch my eye and there are 40 minutes left for debate. I think that the arithmetic will be obvious.

8.39 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): May I respond with care to what the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has just said, and let me remind him that two of those at Nuremberg were executed because they signed the order for the airmen in question.

Let me also remind the right hon. Gentleman that when the four international judges went out they decided to get the easy cases out first. They said that von Papen, Hjalmar Schacht and Fritsche were guilty, but eventually those three were acquitted. So let us not be too pompous about the certainty of justice in the wake of Birmingham and Guildford.

As a Scots lawyer, what I find most objectionable about the Hetherington-Chalmers report is not that it is retrospective or that it alters the extraditional concepts of the law, but that it alters the evidential concept of the law—the idea that one can be convicted on the hearsay evidence of someone who is dead, when that evidence is not capable of any form of investigation.

My goodness, if we were not able to get a conviction right 17 years ago, are we likely to get it right on hearsay evidence when the crime happened 50 years ago? I find the concept contrary to the theory of justice upon which the law of Scotland is formed, if not the law of England. Uncorroborated hearsay from the dead seems to me to be a strange basis for attempting to try people for crimes, however frightful they were.

Let us not forget that it took this Government to admit that it was the Russians who murdered the Polish officer corps at Katyn. It was this Government who allowed the memorial to be built. It was blown up by Russian agents and then recreated.

I have a great friend called Zoe Polanska-Palmer, who was taken from Russia, at the age of 12, to Auschwitz. She was the principal object of experiments by Dr. Mengele. She was moved to the pleasures of Dachau by a Polish officer. During an air raid she escaped and walked—speaking only Russian—from Dachau over the Alps and was hidden by the partisans. Then she was taken to Klagenfurt and, on the orders of Sir Toby Low, she was loaded at bayonet-point, to be taken back and shot. Because she was only a young girl and she was injured, a British officer pushed her off the lorry and that is why she is still alive, in Tayport in Scotland.

I do not have any sentimentality when it comes to the wrongness or the brutality of those who committed these crimes, but I believe that if we attempt to get these old jellyfish into court now, they would either be wrongly or pointlessly convicted.

Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Russians, Czechoslovakians and Poles—how many thousand war crimes did they each commit? Let us bury the past.

8.45 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I can be brief because the contributions against the Bill that we have heard today, especially in the earlier part of the debate, have been first class and extremely persuasive. There is no doubt whatsoever that the balance of the argument is now substantially against the Bill.

Although I have been against the principle of retrospective legislation—legislation bent for the purpose of establishing cases against alleged war criminals—from

[Mr. Ivor Stanbrook]

the very beginning, in view of the speeches that we have heard against the Bill, it is not necessary for me to speak at length.

One of the best contributions was that of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) because he demonstrated conclusively to anyone who had not already made up his mind about the Bill——

Ms. Short: Or hers.

Mr. Stanbrook: Yes, or had not made up her mind. He showed that it would be wrong to proceed with it. It is certainly a pity for his argument and for his reputation that he rested his opposition to the Bill upon a matter of such little merit, namely, that it is desirable to declare that we are against the holocaust. Of course we are against the holocaust, but that is not part of the argument.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook put the Home Secretary on the spot by asking whether there will be prosecutions under the Bill if we pass it. The Home Secretary did not answer in a satisfactory manner, and the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook would not allow me to intervene to point that out. The argument, which ought to be pressed home, is that unless the Bill is passed, the people concerned—three elderly individuals who now live in this country—cannot be prosecuted. The Bill must be passed to enable that. Only one Law Officer can decide that they will not then be prosecuted.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Two.

Mr. Stanbrook: My hon. and learned Friend is right —two. Another Law Officer is responsible for Scottish jurisdiction. It is said that at least one of the three lives in Scotland.

However, the ultimate law enforcement authority in this country has to decide whether a prosecution is in the public interest. That cannot be laid down in the Bill. It is not in the Bill. The Bill does not contradict the existing constitution of this country—or not as far as England and Wales are concerned.

The Attorney-General must decided ultimately whether any case should go forward for prosecution and whether to prosecute it would be in the public interest.

I thought it rather daring of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General not only to be present for the earlier speeches, but to intervene in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) to suggest that the Attorney-General could not possibly authorise a trial that became a show trial. That must be one of the strongest arguments against the Bill. If it is passed, the chances of a show trial, or show trials, for the three old men is very great.

I felt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General was skating on thin ice when he posed that question. Ultimately—whatever happens to the Bill —if some jurisdiction is given to the British criminal courts to try the people concerned, he will still have to decide whether, in the light of the evidence and every other consideration, it is in the public interest to pursue the matter. He should keep that judgment clear and separate in his mind. I have no doubt that he will do so, but it would be better if he expressed no opinion until the time came.

There are good reasons why prosecutions are not in the public interest. Let me list three of them. The first lies in the concept of retrospection—for, no matter what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and the proponents of the Bill may say, this is retrospective criminal legislation. The Minister says that it is not criminal legislation; that, while it may be retrospective, it extends only to jurisdiction. This is the first time that I have heard anyone say that a change in the jurisdiction of a criminal court is not part of the criminal law. Of course it is—especially, and more definitively, because in this instance the jurisdiction will be changed in a particular way, in relation to particular events, at a particular time and in a particular place. That is very selective, and cannot possibly escape the label of retrospective criminal legislation.

Many arguments have been advanced against treating the Bill as retrospective legislation; we have heard some tonight. Let us not forget, however, why we do not like retrospective legislation. Not only would it be unfair to charge someone with an offence when no such offence existed at the time of its commission; it would also be unfair if, because of what had passed since the commission of the offence, it was impracticable or, indeed, almost impossible to initiate a prosecution. Do not let us become involved in arguments about whether we knew in 1948 that certain people had come to this country whom we knew to be guilty of certain offences and whether that was deliberate, a question raised rather unworthily by some hon. Members in regard to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. Such arguments are irrelevant.

To change the law after 50 years is to say to the individual concerned, "No matter that you kept no records, no documents and no memories of the events of 50 years ago. No matter that you have not kept in touch with friends who could possibly help you to defend yourself. No matter that you did not keep alibi evidence. You simply did not know that you would be prosecuted." It is fundamentally unfair, 50 years on, to bring a charge and to ask the accused to defend himself against the weight of a Government machine that has spent half a million pounds, engaged the services of 20 or 30 police officers and toured eastern Europe for 18 months trying to obtain the evidence that, according to part two of the report, will be damning enough to justify the legislation.

Retrospection is the offence embodied in the Bill—an offence that we should not contemplate, because, in view of the time lapse, it is doubly unfair. If we cannot give these people a fair trial, we cannot say that we are exercising British justice, for a fair trial is fundamental to all British justice.

My second point has already been made—although with less force—by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). For the purposes of the Bill, the law has been changed in the past 12 months to enable evidence to be admitted in court that is derived from sources who are deceased, or, for some other reason, unable to appear as witnesses to give honourable testimony. We should bear in mind that 50 years have passed. Written statements from witnesses can be used, regardless of how they came to be made—up to 50 years ago—and regardless of the possibility that they are forgeries.

Ms. Short: The Hetherington report even suggests that statements from people who are now dead can be used, whatever the conditions in which they were made.

Mr. Stanbrook: That is indeed one of the report's recommendations. The report has proved very useful, in that it gave us the sources that we needed; but, when discussing the legal difficulties, it effectively told us, "The way in which to bring a case is to bend, or change, the law." The ultimate consequence is a Bill like this, which changes the jurisdiction of the courts. That is an inherent injustice. If the Bill is enacted and trials follow, three people will be arraigned—three known people: the Simon Wiesenthal Centre has made sure that the newspapers, and everyone else, know their names and where they live. Simon Wiesenthal's own people have paraded up and down outside the House of one of the prospective defendants, accusing him of being guilty.

If the Bill is passed, the law will be directed solely towards the object of bringing three people to court on evidence that has been changed and adjusted for that specific purpose. As a practising barrister of some 30 years' standing, I would have voted against the Bill on that ground alone. There is, however, another argument—the argument that the people concerned should be entitled to obtain witnesses and evidence in their defence. It has been pointed out that legal aid is available to them, but those of us who have used legal aid in such circumstances, or have tried to, will laugh at that. It is difficult enough to obtain a witness from overseas; to obtain a witness who can testify to events of 50 years ago is another matter, and the resources of the legal aid fund will not rise to such a challenge. The argument is spurious; it would not be practically possible for any of the accused to defend themselves. In the end they will have to answer these charges, unsupported by all the paraphernalia that applies to prosecutions and without all the resources that are available to the prosecuting authorities.

Therefore, we have to ask ourselves whether we intend to legislate for an injustice. It is no use those who support the Bill saying that justice can be done. Due to the way that it has been contrived, it will be impossible for the defence to establish credentials and evidence of such a nature as to enable it to make its case.

The question of identification was referred to by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). Can one imagine the difficulties of identification after 50 years? One case was in 1941, 50 years ago. Identification ought to depend not on whether the individual was there but on whether he committed the crime. He may well be identified as having been present, but British justice ought to require that it is proved that he was the criminal, not a bystander, with German guns in view and German soldiers standing around.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South suggested that modern techniques—DNA testing, no doubt, and all the other wonderful techniques that are now available—are used to identify defendants as criminals. However, they could not be used in Lithuania in 1941, under wartime conditions.

Please let us not legislate for an injustice. We cannot say that it is possible for British justice to be applied now to what happened then. It is no use talking about what happened in this country years ago but has been discovered only now. Trials could take place at any time in this country under our jurisdiction. The evidence would be available in a civilised country where law and order is, happily, the normal rule. Documentary evidence would have been preserved. We are not, however, talking about such a case; we are talking about doing an injustice to people who at the moment are living under the British system of justice. Justice will not be obtained if we bend the law in the way that the Bill requires us to do. Therefore, I call upon the House to vote against it.

9.1 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): The speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) was very well constructed, valuable and helpful. I pay tribute to him for what he said against the Bill and recognise his knowledge of the issue. However, I believe that the Bill ought to be supported. Therefore, I intend to put before him a different point of view—though briefly, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

Perhaps each generation sees the war that it experienced as the war—the benchmark of evil, the hallmark of horror, the epitome of brave deeds and thus its war criminals as unique in the evil that they committed. The Bill addresses only the second world war and the criminals that it spawned.

Alas, there is no end to the cruelty of mankind. Man's inhumanity to man continues ceaselessly and with a ferocity that is heightened and deepened by today's fiendish inventions, Cambodia's genocide—that mountain of skulls—Iraq's barbarism—what we read of the abominable cruelty to Kuwaitis—and the impassive horror of China's army in Tiananmen square, with the blood of students flowing over the stones. We do not attempt to deal with those killers tonight, nor do we plan to do so in the future. Why, then, this Bill, when the voices of all those who have been treated cruelly, or who have been tortured, maimed or killed, echo throughout the centuries? It is because we, as a Christian nation, played our part in the anti-Semitic European movement over the centuries. Today, as a multi-faith society, rooted and grounded in a more tolerant Christianity, we have a small chance to make reparation. We can rebalance the scales. Anti-Semitism is not dead. The Jews are persecuted always. In England and Scotland in the 12th century, we piled Jews into chimneys and lit the fires beneath them. In the 1940s, those chimneys were recreated in Auschwitz, and with the freeing of Poland we now have the opportunity to see them.

That shows the uniqueness of the Bill; anti-Semitism is the key. As a Christian, I have some responsibility to wipe out that evil.

9.4 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): If my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) will forgive me, I shall not follow the sentiments that she expressed.

Three speeches reflect the dilemma in which I find myself in confronting this issue. One speech stood out: would that I had the eloquence of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). The three speeches were made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour).

We all agree about the enormity of the crimes that were committed. I do not intend to impugn any hon. Member

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who expressed hatred and abhorrence about those crimes, but it takes little imagination to know the evil that was perpetrated.

The hon. Member for Ladywood expressed the dilemma truly in wanting to hit out and to express the rage and concern of humanity by saying that those crimes are unacceptable.

Why should not we pass the Bill? The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook addressed that issue powerfully —so powerfully that he reached the conclusion that, should anybody be mistaken about the fact that he regarded these crimes as an anathema, he was going to set aside the most formidable list of reservations that I have heard about the Bill in order, for declaratory purposes, to show that he could not be associated with a scintilla of doubt about his distaste and hatred for the activities that took place almost half a century ago.

I shall not question the conclusion that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook reached from the evidence that he adduced. That evidence was well expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham, who, in a detailed, clinical, detached but cerebral manner, reminded us of the principles of our legal system.

I sympathise with all three expressions of opinion. I do not condone the activities that took place 45 or 50 years ago—no hon. Member would wish to be associated with them—but I must ask myself, not as a lawyer but as a human being, whether I honestly believe that we shall effect justice according to the terms of our courts. I doubt whether we shall do so and on that basis, mindful of my abhorrence of the acts that took place, I cannot support the Bill.

9.8 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I support the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and the eloquent speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). As they put the case extremely well, I shall make only one fundamental point about retrospection. Most hon. Members, if not all, would agree that war crimes are horrific and should be punished.

Indeed, I would go further than many hon. Members, because I support capital punishment. Although the punishment may be severe——

Ms. Short: This is a very funny time at which to be talking about supporting capital punishment. If ever two groups of criminals would have been hanged, it is the six men convicted of the Birmingham bombings and the men convicted of the Guildford bombings. Years later, we know that they were wrongfully convicted. In view of that fact—quite apart from all the other arguments—how does the hon. Gentleman now dare to stand up and say that he supports capital punishment?

Mr. Browne: I do not agree with the hon. Lady that it is a funny time. It is an important time, and the hon. Lady has made my point clearly. The more severe the punishment—capital punishment even—the more we must strive for justice. There can be no justification for supporting capital punishment if trials admit of the possibility of injustice. That is my key point in this case, and I am glad that the hon. Lady said that. However severe the punishment, it must be just and not just convenient. In this case, it may be popular. It may be politically convenient. But it must also be fundamentally just.

It is for basic justice that we and our forefathers have fought over centuries.

A key element of our principles of justice is the onus of proof. The accused is innocent until proved guilty. At the weekend, I heard a well-meaning member of my own party saying on television, "Oh, but the Guildford and Birmingham men had not been proved innocent." Surely they had to be proved guilty. That is the fundamental point. We in the House have already bent the rule of the onus of proof in respect of some of our anti-drugs legislation. I do not support that principle because it leads to a slippery slope.

My second point relates to the right to cross-examination.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Before we get lost in the idea that the debate is about the holocaust, let us not forget that 60 million gentiles died in the last war.

Mr. Browne: I am sure that we shall remember that.

My second point relates to the right to cross-examine witnesses, which is fundamental to natural justice. My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington made it clear that, in this case, the rules have been bent to suit this Bill.

The last of my three basic points concerns knowledge of the law, which is assumed in our system of justice.

I support the argument of the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who made an eloquent speech in favour of plugging the gap. I agree with him that the gap should be plugged and that its very existence is abhorrent. However, attractive as it may be, it should not be done retrospectively.

I believe that the Bill would lead to show trials. Doubtless, they would be very popular and highly convenient politically. But they would be a travesty of justice.

The Bill was debated in the other place and their Lordships, many of whom are extremely well versed in the law, voted against it. Their Lordships do not have party constituencies and were able to speak and vote relatively unaffected by considerations of public popularity and political convenience. They defeated the Bill by a large margin—by 273 to 60. That may have been a political nuisance but it was right because it was just.

I believe that the Bill represents retrospective legislation which would be intrinsically unjust, and I urge the House to vote it down.

9.13 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): This has been an extremely thoughtful debate—on both sides of the argument. It is interesting to note that several hon. Members appear to have changed their minds since we last debated the matter. It will be extremely interesting to see not only the outcome of tonight's vote but the number of hon. Members who, for whatever reason, choose not to vote. It is to be a free vote, and there will be no rancour if hon. Members choose to go different ways when we divide.

Before I deal with the substance of the argument, I should like to refer to one matter raised by the hon.

Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), who is not in his place at the moment. The hon. Gentleman said that, if the Bill fails to be given its Second Reading tonight, there will be those who will publish the information contained in the second part of the Hetherington-Chalmers report. That is a dangerous and threatening statement. If there are to be trials, they should be conducted in a court room and not in newspapers or on the streets. We do not want witch hunts. The Minister must make it clear when he replies that the report will not be published under any circumstances unless a trial was to proceed.

Mr. John Patten: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that I agree entirely that it would be wrong for the Government at any stage to publish that information? Does he also recognise that to do so would be deeply prejudicial to those who might in future find themselves accused of a crime and also to the many people whose names were brought forward for the investigation, were examined and found to be totally innocent and were exonerated? If that were to happen, it would be deeply prejudicial.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the Minister of State and I wholeheartedly agree with him. I hope that those who follow our proceedings and those who might have access to information that might be highly damaging to individuals will take note of what has been said.

The principle underlying the Bill remains correct. However, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I have reservations about how it would work in practice. I did not intervene when hon. Members, particularly Conservative Members, said that my right hon. Friend had rested his entire case on the need to make a declaratory statement against those people who might have perpetrated such horrific crimes. He did not peril his case simply on that statement, because it would have been wrong to do that. Like me, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook believes that the principle underlying the Bill is correct.

It is wrong that British courts have no jurisdiction over crimes of murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide committed abroad by people who were not British subjects at the time but who have now become so. That problem has not arisen since 1957 and British courts now have such jurisdiction. However, it is wrong that a person accused of such crimes can escape prosecution while another person who was a British subject at the time cannot do so. That is especially important when we consider the nature of those crimes.

Ms. Short: Under the Geneva convention that was incorporated into British law around 1956 and under the Genocide Act 1969 to which my hon. Friend has referred, we have powers, but we have never prosecuted in relation to the killing of Kurds or other awful war crimes. This debate is not simply about powers; it involves war crimes in recent history as well as distant history. Does that not trouble my hon. Friend?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is quite right. Since 1957 —and since 1969 when the legislation was considerably widened—British courts have had jurisdiction to hear the case of an individual accused of such crimes who is resident within any of the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom.

Many crimes have gone unprosecuted and will continue to go unprosecuted and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) identified some of them. If someone is living in this country against whom charges can be made, it is wrong to say that nothing should be done simply because there are others elsewhere in the same position or perhaps in a far worse position. I accept that the people who are likely to come before our courts may feel aggrieved because others may be responsible for far worse crimes. However, it does not seem to be any more right to say that we cannot prosecute anyone for any crime on the ground that there may be someone somewhere else who is guilty of a worse crime. That argument does not stand up.

While I have no doubt about the principle of the Bill, I have every doubt about the implementation of its provisions. Before I consider the provisions, I want to refer to retrospection, which particularly taxed members of the other place in their debates on the matter last year.

Of course the legislation is retrospective in the strict sense. We should not be here tonight if it were not. However, it seems that there is an important point: the Bill seeks to give British courts retrospective jurisdiction. It does not seek to create a new crime. It would be wrong to do that. As such atrocities have probably always been criminal and since the Hague convention of 1907 they have certainly been criminal, we are not establishing a new crime; we are merely making it possible to prosecute those individuals in one or other of the jurisdictions in the United Kingdom.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Surely it would be a new crime if a Lithuanian were to kill a Russian in Germany, and surely it would be new if that person were to be tried in Scotland. I have never heard of such a thing.

Mr. Darling: The crime is the act of killing. The subsequent charging of someone is no part of the crime. In Germany, and elsewhere in Europe, it has always been a crime to kill someone. The purpose of this Bill is to enable a court in England or Scotland to hear the case and, if it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence, to convict. It seems to me that the hon. and learned Gentleman's point is misconceived.

On the question of retrospection, it is important to bear in mind the fact that in 1950 the European convention on human rights anticipated that someone might be prosecuted for an act even though, at the time of the offence, there was no jurisdiction to hear the case.

When the other place declined to give the previous Bill a Second Reading, it was said that that decision was controversial. Indeed, the Home Secretary made the point that the other place had overruled the elected Chamber. I accept that entirely. There is some force in the argument that, in the event of a conflict between the two Chambers, the will of the House of Commons must prevail. Indeed, it would be far better if the second Chamber were elected. In that case, its revising and delaying role would be fully accepted as part of the democratic process. Thus, that element of such a controversy would be removed.

In answer to a point that was made by the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour), I should make the point that legal arguments were not the only ones to be employed in another place. The Members of the other place who are lawyers are quite capable of raising points that are entirely political. Indeed, they do

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just that. As Parliament is currently constituted, they are entitled to express their views. We should be in some danger were we to believe that everything that lawyers say must be right. In saying so, I speak as a lawyer.

Let me say something about my doubts. It seems to me that the fundamental duty of any court is to ensure that the accused gets a fair trial. That is a matter which has troubled many hon. and right hon. Members during the debate today. Before deciding to charge an individual, the Crown must give serious consideration to the weight and quality of the evidence. Once a person is charged, the die is cast. There will be publicity, and set in train will be certain events that would be difficult to undo. If there is a doubt, the Crown should not proceed.

I lay some emphasis on the role of the Crown, as it seems to me that it is a strength of the Scottish system, and now of the English system, that the Crown is given a considerable degree of judgment. It is important that the Crown should evaluate the evidence that it is prepared to lead—the quality of the evidence that the court is likely to hear—before deciding that prosecution is justified. Indeed, one of my reasons for supporting the Bill is that it will enable the Crown to make that judgment—to weigh the quality of evidence against any individual, and decide whether prosecution is justified. Of course, the prosecutor will still have a duty to have regard to the public interest. If the Crown's view is that it would not be in the public interest to prosecute an individual, nothing in this Bill will take away from that.

Reference has been made to the possibility of show trials. It would be wrong to characterise any trial in this country as a show trial as we understand that term. Not even in our wildest moments would we accuse the present Government, or a Government formed by my party, of being so crass as to stage a show trial for political purposes. The media, especially in England and Wales, have quite wide latitude in the way they report matters, both before and during a trial. We must be very careful that, before the Crown decides to proceed, it is satisfied that it has a case that it can prosecute to a successful conclusion. No proceedings should be started on the basis of the mere chance of success, or in the belief that, once this Bill becomes a statute, we must be seen to be doing something about the problem. That would be quite wrong.

The Crown will have a number of substantial difficulties. The first, which was referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), is delay. Delay in itself is not a bar of trial, but it presents formidable difficulties. It is not enough to stop the prosecution in its tracks, but none the less the Crown will have to have regard to the fact that nearly 50 years have elapsed since the crimes were allegedly committed. I strongly believe that the fact that a crime took place some years ago should never be a reason for not prosecuting. We do not have a statute of limitations, and nor should we have one. In fact, within our recent memory is a case in which the body of a baby was found in an individual's back garden and it was found that the baby had died in the 1960s or late 1950s. No one ever argued that that individual should not have been prosecuted. As it happened, if I recollect correctly, he was subsequently convicted. I understand that delay may be a ground for stopping a trial in England, but I am less certain of the position in Scotland. The position in Scotland was referred to in the other place.

Connected with delay is consideration of the quality of evidence. It has been said that old men never forget. I accept that, but I cannot believe that old men, or even young men for that matter, always remember things exactly as they happened. Anyone who has been in a court room must be aware of the difficulties that arise even after a short period. In Scotland, people in custody are brought to trial within three months, yet it is quite common for a witness not to remember what he saw, despite being quite certain about it until he went into the witness box and was cross-examined. How much worse would the position be after 50 years? Indeed, a witness may remember an event that sticks in his mind—perhaps the killing of an individual—but will he remember the circumstantial evidence and the various bits of evidence that fit into the crucial jigsaw?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn *rose——*

Mr. Darling: Once more, out of deference to the hon. and learned Gentleman from the same Bar as myself, I shall give way.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am anxious to know whether, when it comes to evidence, the law of England is to be raised to the qualifications of the law of Scotland, or whether the law of Scotland is to be lowered to the laxity of the law of England.

Mr. Darling: I was about to refer to that very point. There is one difficulty that the Government must address, and that is the problem that they face with different laws on corroboration. It is ironic that the Home Secretary should announce a royal commission last Friday—I hope that it will address the desirability of corroboration being part and parcel of English criminal law—yet trials may take place under this legislation before the royal commission reports and certainly, I suspect, before anything is done about its findings. It will be ironic that someone accused of a war crime and prosecuted in Scotland will be entitled to various protections that he would simply not have in England. For example, the evidence that is laid against him will have to be corroborated. It will not be possible in Scotland to have evidence delivered by video.

In Scotland, identification of the accused is vital. The Crown cannot proceed without it. In England the system is different because there is no dock identification; instead identification is done by a different system that may have many advantages, but I suspect that in this case an accused would rather be brought to trial in Scotland, where it will be necessary for witnesses to appear in the witness box and to point the finger at the accused and say, "That is the man whom I saw do those things 50 years ago."

I should be grateful if the Minister would let us know whether the Government will try to resurrect the attempt to introduce video evidence in Scotland. The Minister will recall that, last year in the debacle on the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill, that was one of the provisions that were lost, and so also was the Chalmers report recommendation that statements made by people who are now dead should be admissible. I should be grateful if the Minister would tell us whether the Government still intend to amend the legislation.

Although I believe that the Bill should get a Second Reading and that people who are accused of war crimes should be prosecuted, I would take great objection if any attempt were made to amend the laws of evidence to bring about those prosecutions. If those people are to be brought to trial, it must be done under existing criminal procedures. The law must not be altered to secure a conviction, as that would be wholly wrong and objectionable.

The Hetherington-Chalmers proposal that evidence on commission should be widely accepted is not satisfactory. Indeed, it is difficult to see how a jury will convict if it cannot see the witnesses, evaluate their credibility and demeanour and do everything normally expected of juries. I strongly believe that if witnesses are to point the finger at individuals, they should—except in the most exceptional circumstances—do so within a court. Juries should not be invited to convict on the strength of documentary evidence, perhaps taken on commission or from some old, frail individual giving evidence on a video against an accused person whom they cannot and will never see.

I support the Bill because if a charge is to be brought against those individuals, it is important that they should be prosecuted. The trials must be fair and be seen to be fair or far more injustice will be done than if we simply let matters lie.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood said that the Hetherington-Chalmers report mentioned that many names were translated into the Cyrillic alphabet. It is easy to make mistakes—indeed, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that deliberate mistakes were made. During the cold war under Stalin, Soviet officials may have altered the records for their own reasons. It would be wrong for someone to be convicted on bogus evidence that cannot be cross-examined. I suspect that those who made the alterations and those responsible for keeping the records are now long dead or, if not, would certainly not be keen to speak up.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Member rightly mentions various constraints and caveats. He seems to be coming to the conclusion that the chances of securing a conviction in a war crimes trial would be minimal. Does he agree with that, and, if so, why does he support the Bill?

Mr. Darling: I do not believe that. If I believed that there was no prospect of a conviction under the law of evidence in Scotland or England, there would be no point in supporting the Bill. I support the principle of the Bill because I believe that, although there are formidable difficulties, a fair trial is possible. As I said earlier—I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present—the Crown must weigh up all those considerations when deciding whether to mount a prosecution. In the light of the hon. Gentleman's speech, it is possible to support the principle of something while holding honest doubts about it. Ultimately, the question is whether the doubts are sufficient to change one's mind. In my case, they are not.

Other matters were considered this evening and in the debate in the other place. There was a question about what happened in 1948 and whether the British Government decided to abandon war trials for all time. Although I was not born then, I understand why the Parliament of the day decided that it did not wish to go on with the war trials in Germany. However, we must differentiate between investigating about 8 million possible former Nazi party members—who would all have been culpable to varying degrees—while at the same time trying to rebuild West Germany and Europe, with the position that exists in 1991, when we are confronted with evidence that a few individuals may have been responsible for horrific crimes about which we can do nothing because we lack the jurisdiction.

Ms. Short: The Bill empowers us to prosecute anyone for murder, but we know that after 1948 people accused of the monstrous organisation of mass murder were not prosecuted. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Darling: I thought that I had already dealt with that matter. I do not quite understand my hon. Friend's question. In view of the shortage of time, if she would like to pursue the matter later I shall be happy to discuss it with her.

I believe that the principle of the Bill must be right. However, one issue troubles me, and it did so when we debated the subject in Committee. It involves pre-trial publicity. Ostensibly the law in England and Scotland is the same. I can do no better than rely on the Minister of State, who told me that they were the same, so that must be right. However, those of us who read the newspapers, north and south of the border, wonder whether there is any relationship between the two legislations. In Scotland, once suspicion has been focused, the press are severely restricted in what they can report, but in England that does not seem to be the position.

We are all familiar with the concept of trial by newspaper. In the fairly recent past, trials have attracted great publicity, and newspapers have felt free to publish photographs and highly damaging articles about an accused individual. The Government must consider whether it is time to amend the law in England to stop such things happening. The issue of the innocence or guilt of an individual is a matter for the jury alone. It is no use saying to the jury, as judges frequently do, "You must ignore anything you read in the newspaper, hear on radio, or see on the television." That is like throwing a skunk into the jury room and asking the jury to forget the smell—that simply will not work. I hope that, having had a year to reflect on the matter, the Minister will say that the Government are prepared to do something about that problem. If he does not, perhaps it is something to which the royal commission could attend when considering what should be done with British criminal law.

On the last two occasions that the House debated the Bill, a majority supported the principle behind it. I hope that that will remain the case. Most people accept that there are difficulties, most of which will have to be shouldered by the Crown. I also hope that if we give the Bill a Second Reading, the other place will note that we have given a considered judgment and have not taken a hasty decision. This debate was born not out of great emotion, but out of a recognition that there is a problem in this country and there are individuals against whom serious allegations have been made which should be answered. We do not underestimate the difficulties that will face the Crown or the accused in the event that he or she is brought to trial.

It seems to me and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends that the principle behind the Bill must be right,

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notwithstanding the difficulties. For those reasons, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to give the Bill a Second Reading.

9.37 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I shall endeavour to do all I can to reply to the points raised by hon. Members in what, by any standards, has been an excellent debate. By my counting, if my arithmetic is correct, there have been 32 speeches, including mine, since 3.30 pm—a prodigious number. I have done a rough running count of those in favour and those against, and, to borrow from your terminology, Mr. Speaker, the ayes seem to be 19, including me and my right hon. Friend and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, and the noes 13. However, this is a matter to be decided not by the numbers who spoke in favour or against the Bill, but in the Division Lobbies afterwards and in another place.

I must address the majority of my remarks to those people who are against the Bill, so I shall not say a great deal about those who have spoken strongly in its favour, except to say that, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said, the debate has been marked by extremely calm and lucid argument on both sides, with little emotion and certainly no acrimony, apart from one enjoyable outburst between a Whip and an hon. Lady on the Opposition Benches. The incident entertained the few of us in the Chamber who were privileged to see it, but I suspect that it has nothing to do with us or the Bill.

Of those who have spoken in favour, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) said that prosecutions were difficult, but that we should proceed on the issue of principle, and I agree with him. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) said that he had consulted widely in the British community, including the Jewish community, because he feared that the measure might lead to a growth in anti-Semitism in this country. He and others had seen none of that, so he felt that the Bill should proceed unencumbered, with which I agree.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) made a remarkable speech. As I sat listening to him, I could not believe that he had not been legally trained. He stressed the importance of the House exercising its judgment and of individual Members of Parliament deciding the law, willing the law, willing the means and then leaving it to the courts to decide. I entirely agree with him; and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) felt much the same. I also agree with the tone of the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who had not intended to speak, but I am glad that he decided to do so.

The Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), spoke with authority, and I agree with all that he was allowed to say in 10 minutes before he was so cruelly cut off by the rule.

I was especially glad that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) managed to catch the eye of Mr. Deputy Speaker. He was able not only to examine the arguments of learned Law Lords and others in another place where, generally speaking, legal experts tend to take one view, but to compare and contrast the views of the senior judiciary—Law Lords and others—with the developing views of those who are much younger. It was a case of, "Let generation speak to generation". What the hon. and learned Gentleman said perhaps illustrates a substantial generation difference between some of those in another place and some of those who practise with him or who sometimes sit under his eye when he is in court as a recorder.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) spoke most movingly of his recent visit to a concentration camp, but he also spoke unemotionally, and his speech was all the more telling for that. Nobody tried to play on the emotions of any other hon. Member. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) broke her Trappist vow by sprinting from the Whip's seat to the Back Benches to make a powerful speech in support of the Bill. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Torbay (Mr. Allason) also made powerful speeches. We were then treated by the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) to what the Michelin guide used to call "a little history". I am glad that he gave us that little history of war crimes from 1939 to 1945 and the period immediately after the war, because his speech set much in context. I should like to return to some of his comments when I deal with the important points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) also supported the speech in an intervention.

From the Opposition Front Bench, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said that they would support the Bill, although they would not seek to advise their hon. Friends. I welcome what the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said. I understand his deep thinking on the issue since last year and the concerns that have moved him to cleave to his earlier decision to support the Bill, although there was a large declaratory element in the reasons that he gave for doing so. The Home Secretary and I are also grateful to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook for expressing the view that the Government have acted with constitutional propriety. Some people would not agree, but I do, unlike one or two colleagues who feel that we have not behaved with constitutional propriety. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the Bill represents a change in jurisdiction in the criminal law but does not introduce any new offences. I shall deal with that point when I respond to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). I certainly agree with the strong view—and I have not heard it disputed by any hon. Member from either side of the debate—that there should not be a statute of limitations in this country. That point was made by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

I owe the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central an answer to the points that they raised about Scottish legislation. I tread with some temerity into Scottish law, all the more so as I see the menacing shape of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) behind me. I am no expert in Spanish—*[Laughter.]* I am no expert in Spanish practices, which I am sure are not practised at the Scottish Bar.

The Hetherington-Chalmers inquiry recommended that the facility of live television evidence should be available in war crimes trials. The law already provides for that generally, as we saw in the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mr. Hattersley: What about Scotland?

Mr. Patten: I am coming to that point. I was comparing and contrasting England and Scotland. That provision is now in force for many serious crimes such as murder, manslaughter and serious fraud, and not especially for war crimes. Following a period of consultation, the Government proposed that a similar general facility should be provided in Scotland. A provision to that effect was included in the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill last Session. The provision was removed from the Bill during its parliamentary passage because, I am advised, of the pressure of parliamentary time. The Government remain of the view that live television links should be available for the giving of evidence from abroad in all Scottish trials of all serious crimes. It is the Government's intention to add a provision to that effect and to have it introduced at an early legislative opportunity.

Mr. Darling: Will the Minister tell us when the Government intend to introduce the change? It seems to us that it is being introduced only for the benefit of this legislation. I do not know what consultation the Minister has had. Presumably, from what he said earlier, he is having that consultation in Spain rather than in Scotland. He must understand that there will be deep resentment if the law in Scotland is to be amended simply to enable convictions to take place under this legislation.

Mr. Patten: Any future legislative changes will not be brought forward before the end of this Session. If such changes were made to parliamentary law as it affects Scotland, had any trials begun, they would not be affected by any changes in the law that were coming at a later stage.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: It is difficult to mix it with my hon. and learned Friend, but I will give way on this point on Scottish law and then no more.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: It would be absolutely outrageous if it were thought in the House that the reason that the Government withdrew that absurd condition in the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill was time. We in Scotland are not willing to have our laws of evidence mucked about and watered down just to suit English legislation.

Mr. Patten: The north and south sides of the border should sometimes learn from each other about evidential and other procedures. I am content to say to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that we might learn from some of the ways in which pre-trial publicity is dealt with in Scotland. I am advised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) that the subject of a Scottish allegation raised interdict proceedings following the preparation of a programme on war crimes. Perhaps we should listen to what Scottish law says and, equally, the Scots should look to English and Welsh law to ensure that television evidence, which can be useful in obtaining convictions under proper process of those who are accused of murder, manslaughter, fraud, forgery and other serious international crimes, can be achieved.

Mr. Darling *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I must try to answer the rest of the arguments. I have given way on the Scottish point and I must now turn to the important points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. I greatly respect him and I know that I will not be able to persuade him to change his mind. His speech gives me the opportunity to try to lay to rest two ghosts about what happened in post-war England. The first is that somehow the post-war British Government decided not to proceed against war criminals in this country. With great respect, I must advise my right hon. Friend that not only is there no evidence that there were any such war criminals in this country, but we did not have any laws at the time that would have enabled us to proceed against any such people in this country. That means that at no stage could Her Majesty's Government have decided to stop prosecutions. In any event, it would not have been Her Majesty's Government who would have taken that decision; it would have been the prosecuting authorities of the time.

The second important ghost that we need to lay to rest is that a distinguished Minister came to the Dispatch Box in 1948 and said, on behalf of the Government, that all war crimes trials should come to an end. I shall tell the House what was said on that occasion; indeed, it was widely reported. I have gone into this matter in great detail because I respect the views of those who feel that a binding statement was given at that time. Let us forget the issue whether it is possible to bind one's successors. I have looked at the papers myself and have indirectly employed some historians. It may interest some of my hon. Friends to know that we have a surprising number of historians in the Government service. It is clear to me that the only announcement that was made in this place in 1948 was that the quadripartite allied hearings of alleged war criminals in Germany or German-occupied territory of nationals or foreigners who were then in German-occupied or German territory should cease and that it should be the legislative task of the future German Government to take over those prosecutions. The Federal Republic of Germany took over that legislative burden from 1948 and prosecuted alleged war criminals, not just in 1948, 1958, 1968 and 1978, but almost up to the present day—and those provisions still remain on their statute book.

The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) was, rightly, concerned about fair trials. In his opening speech his right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook flagged the fact that we should listen carefully to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—and we did so. He raised three important points. The first related to identification and its importance. As I understand it, judges can give clear warnings to juries about identification and its dangers. The English and Welsh system varies from the Scottish system, with its different dock identification system.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's second point related to process. Under the present law and present procedure, there is nothing to prevent any judge at any time stopping a case from proceeding if he thinks that a

[Mr. Patten]

fair trial would not be possible. That important common law principle exists now. I note that I have the assent of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and others.

The third point raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon was also mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham in his important speech. We have the judgment of the Deputy Chief Justice of England, Lord Justice Tasker Watkins, on this issue. It will always be up to the courts to decide whether a delay acts against the interests of a fair trial. I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's mind can be set at rest on that matter.

Several other opponents of the Bill made their views starkly known, including the hon. Members for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), who made several interesting interventions. The opponents also include my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes), and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross. Among their number is also my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), who has considerable expertise in extradition law to which we all pay tribute—*[Interruption.]* I suggest that hon. Members visit the Library where they will find that "Stanbrook on Extradition" is the standard text for anyone wishing to bone up on that subject.

We have also heard speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for Winchester (Mr. Browne). I guess that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and I will never have a meeting of minds over what is and what is not retrospective legislation. But he was unfair to Hetherington and Chalmers, a pair of distinguished former Directors of Public Prosecutions. I do not have any DPPs as close personal friends, but I have taken advice and I am told that they are not men normally given to rash judgments or to setting out on quixotic crusades to achieve prosecutions. The hon. Gentleman was less than fair to those retired DPPs.

I wish to say three things in response to the important speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. His speech will bear reading. First, the making of statute criminal law in this place is in the hands of all Members of the House, not those of lawyers, however distinguished, in another place or in the courts. Secondly, the very nature of legislation is that it is selective. My right hon. Friend has been in this place a long time and he must know that in the criminal law, for example, we legislate to deal with specific nuisances and evils. These days we rarely legislate generally because much of the generality of criminal law—thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal and so on—has already been dealt with.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: That is common law.

Mr. Patten: Of course, it is common law. That is an important element in England and Wales.

I remind my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham and my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington that in the Bill before the House we are not inventing any new offence. Murder was an offence in Germany and in German-occupied territory between 1939 and 1945. As many right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, international law finds its fountainhead back in the fourth Hague convention of 1907. That made it absolutely clear that activities involving murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide were against international law. That was recognised in the manuals of both the British and German armies. There is no doubt that murder, manslaughter and culpable homicide were crimes then, as they are now. It is rather a matter for the judgment of the House and the other place: we must decide whether to extend our jurisdiction and provide the laws, which the courts may then interpret.

In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham, let me say that our judgment must be of equal standing to that of any lawyer outside the Chamber.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) asked about the present state of international law on any alleged incidents connected with the Gulf conflict. All the states involved in the Gulf conflict are parties to the Geneva convention of 1949. We took that convention into our own law in 1957. So we have a wide jurisdiction over war crimes committed anywhere in the world after 1957 under international law.

Ms. Short: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: No, I am afraid that I do not have time.

There is no need for new legislation to deal with those who might be accused of crimes in the Gulf conflict, but there is definitely a need for legislation in the cases which may be covered by the Bill.

As a result of the procedural motion which the House passed on a free vote last week, if the Bill receives a Second Reading—I am confident that it will—it will go straight to a formal Third Reading at a subsequent date. My right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council explained on Wednesday why we were following that course. The House has given overwhelming support to both the principle of war crimes legislation and the Bill itself. I have no doubt that that support will be expressed again this evening. As my right hon. Friend explained last week, that was one of the decisive factors in the Government's mind in concluding that the Bill should be reintroduced.

As we have said, the Government hope that accommodation will be achieved between this place and another place without the need for any special measures. Nevertheless, the Government concluded that the Parliament Act 1949 should remain in reserve as a means of resolving any irreconcilable differences. The Bill is a good Bill. The task may be regarded as a difficult one, but the Bill should be passed. I look forward to its reaching the statute book, with the concurrence of both Houses of Parliament, at an early date.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 88.

Division No. 98] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Alexander, Richard	Atkinson, David
Allason, Rupert	Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Allen, Graham	Baldry, Tony
Alton, David	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Amess, David	Barron, Kevin
Arbuthnot, James	Batiste, Spencer

Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Callaghan, Jim
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eastham, Ken
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, John
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hinchliffe, David
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Knapman, Roger
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McKelvey, William
Maclean, David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Wavenay)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowlands, Ted
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Dalyell, Tam
Dewar, Donald
Duffy, A. E. P.
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Faulds, Andrew
Fookes, Dame Janet
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Michael
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkwood, Archy
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Macdonald, Calum A.
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Robertson, George
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Short, Clare
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David

Stewart, Rt Hon Ian (Herts N)
Stokes, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. (Bexleyheath)
Trotter, Neville
Viggers, Peter
Walters, Sir Dennis
Warren, Kenneth
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Browne and
Mr. Tony Marlow.

Question accordingly agreed to.

To be read the Third time tomorrow, pursuant to Order [12th March].

War Crimes Bill [Money]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the War Crimes Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) sums in respect of expenditure by the Receiver of the Metropolitan Police District on the investigation by officers of the Metropolitan Police (with or without other officers) of offences to which that Act applies; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act. —*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I should like to know how much the Bill will cost. Over what sort of period will money be expended for the investigation and bringing to trial of anyone who is prosecuted under it? How many officers of the Metropolitan police will be taken off their normal duties to pursue inquiries made under the Bill? That is the true cost of what we have done this evening. Police officers, who are urgently needed to fight crime elsewhere in the country, will be bogged down in investigations that will prove fruitless and are likely to be thrown out by any decent British jury.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) has asked me those questions. As the explanatory and financial memorandum clearly states, the expenditure incurred will depend on the number of trials.

My hon. Friend asked how many Metropolitan policemen would be needed for the special investigative unit that will have to be set up. The unit, which will indeed be set up by the Metropolitan police commissioner, will require nine officers and supporting staff. At current prices, the unit will cost about £742,000 a year. In Scotland, the equivalent work will be undertaken by the Crown Office. According to the current estimate, the investigative work will cost about £2·1 million in a full year, and the Crown Office in Scotland will incur equivalent expenditure if any trials are pursued there.

I cannot predict the number of trials that will be brought, but they will involve further expenditure on the costs of court rooms and legal aid, both of which, in England and Wales, are the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's Department. In a full year, the costs might be upwards of £2·4 million. The provision of live evidence in England and Wales could cost between £1·5 million and £3 million in any one year.

Last but not least—in view of the importance of ensuring fair trials—is the legal aid fund. We estimate a cost of about £500,000. A low estimate of a full year's costs in England and Wales would be a minimum of £7 million, and the possibility of a maximum of £10 million. After enactment of the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make additional funds available to the Metropolitan police to pay for any officers who are needed.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My right hon. Friend has spoken with some confidence. Will he tell us how many prosecutions have been brought in relation to offences that took place between 45 and 50 years ago in other countries, on which he can base his figures?

Mr. Patten: We have consulted a number of authorities that have changed their legislation in the way that is being proposed. The United States authorities have done it rather differently, by seeking the use of extradition to the countries where people are accused. The costs have therefore been different there. We have, however, also taken advice from the prosecuting authorities in Australia and Canada, where a number of investigations have been made and a number of trials have been mounted. That international evidence, as well as the detailed material evidence that is available to the Lord Chancellor's Department, has led us to the figures that I have given.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough to give us the rough cost per prosecution, given the number of prosecutions that he thinks will result?

Mr. Patten: I cannot do that, because I have no idea how many prosecutions will be made in a full year. The cost will depend on the investigations, the decisions made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General under clause 1(3) and other important issues.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I understand the complexity of the issues. Surely, however, my right hon. Friend appreciates that many police forces—excluding the Metropolitan police force—are now engaged in trying to maintain establishments against heavy Government restrictions such as rate capping. Such expenditure as a consequence of the Bill can hardly be justified, in the light of the claims being made for genuine police expenditure in many other parts of the country.

Mr. Patten: This is the west Yorkshire question, to which I always look forward. I know how strongly my hon. Friend feels about the police force in his area, as do a number of my hon. Friends. The 43 police forces have to deal all the time with a particular range of burdens. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has made available considerably increased funds. Moreover, in the coming year, 700 additional policemen and policewomen will be employed. However, no police force could reasonably have expected this special process to fall on its shoulders. That is why, with the Treasury's concurrence, special provision has been made for it.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): When we debated the War Crimes Bill in Committee last year, I believe that the Minister gave me the undertaking that he is giving to his hon. Friends—that if extraordinary expenditure is incurred by a police force outside the Metropolitan police, which is funded in a different way, the Government would consider reimbursement. My recollection may not be right and the Minister may therefore correct me. I did not check the point. Can he assure us that, if a police force incurs extraordinary expenditure, it will be reimbursed? This is of particular relevance to the Lothian and Borders police force in Scotland, which may be the primary police force with responsibility for investigations in Scotland. That expenditure will not be part of the Home Office budget.

The Minister will remember that in Committee the only concession that was made was that an annual report would be prepared giving an account of what had happened in terms of investigations, prosecutions and cost. Can he assure the House that, notwithstanding the fact that the House cannot amend the Bill, due to the peculiar circumstances in which it is being given its Second Reading tonight, the Government will consider favourably an amendment in another place that would allow a report to be made so that both Houses can monitor the costs involved? I wonder whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer is aware of them, as he prepares his Budget speech. Given those costs, does not the Minister think that Parliament ought to be told how much is being spent each year? Will he repeat the undertaking that he gave to me 12 months ago? I believe that such an undertaking would be welcomed in all parts of the House.

Mr. Patten: Certainly I stand by the words that I uttered in Standing Committee. I have here the relevant *Hansard* reports of the debates. I remember that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) spoke powerfully in favour of an annual report, or a series of reports, not just about the cost of the War Crimes Bill, should it pass through both Houses, but about how the war crimes legislation, if it comes into play, is conducted. I undertook at that stage, and I undertake again tonight, to continue to consider the possibilities of instituting a reporting mechanism. The costs of administration in respect of Scottish courts and the costs of legal aid in respect of the Scottish Home and Health Department would have to be met. I note in particular what the hon. Gentleman said about the Lothian and Borders police force.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the War Crimes Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) sums in respect of expenditure by the Receiver of the Metropolitan Police District on the investigation by officers of the Metropolitan Police (with or without other officers) of offences to which that Act applies; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

GOVERNMENT TRADING FUNDS

That the draft Vehicle Inspectorate Trading Fund Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 18th February, be approved.

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Agricultural, Fishery and Aquaculture Products (Improvement Grant) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

FEES AND CHARGES

That the draft Department of Transport (Fees) (Amendment) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 4th March, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Financial Provisions (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

NUCLEAR FUSION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9025/90, relating to research into controlled nuclear fusion and amendments to the Statutes of the Joint European Torus joint undertaking; and endorses the Government's view that agreement to the new Community Fusion Programme and to extension of the Joint European Torus Programme to 1996 will maximise the scientific value of the latter project and the associated experiments of Member States and that the Community's programme for fusion research should be subject to a rigorous independent assessment of the prospects of fusion in the light of the evidence of progress, before any long-term decisions on a Next Step device are taken.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Select Committees (Membership)

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendments to motions Nos. 10, 12 and 15 for debate. I remind the House that this is a narrow debate and should be confined to whether hon. Members should be removed from Committees and replaced by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and, under motion No. 15, by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell).

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that it is technically competent to invite the House to divide on each of the motions that you have selected?

Mr. Speaker: It is certainly competent, but the hon. Gentleman knows why I have selected the amendments.

10.25 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): I beg to move,

That Mr. Gerald Bowden be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mr. Patrick Thompson be added to the Committee.

I shall speak briefly to the motion and to the other motions which it may be convenient to discuss at the same time:

That Mr. Malcolm Moss be discharged from the Energy Committee and Mr. Cecil Franks be added to the Committee.

That Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Keith Mans and Mr. Robin Squire be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Ralph Howell, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Hugo Summerson be added to the Committee.

That Mr. Ivor Stanbrook be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr. David Sumberg be added to the Committee.

That Mr. Charles Wardle be discharged from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and Sir Richard Luce be added to the Committee.

That Mr. Jonathan Sayeed be discharged from the Defence Committee and Mr. Michael Knowles be added to the Committee.

That Mr. William Powell be discharged from the Foreign Affairs Committee and Mr. David Harris be added to the Committee.

The motions affect seven Select Committees, and nine colleagues are prevented from carrying out work that is vital to Parliament, or so I am told.

I can add little to the speech that I made on 21 January. I understand that one or two colleagues thought that it was provocative, which I find unbelievable. Given the number of interventions in that debate, brevity could be the solution.

Having read the debate on 21 January, I can believe only that this is a re-run of that debate and the one before that. If hon. Members wish to place new facts before me, in my usual manner, I shall deal with them as expeditiously as possible. I therefore trust Opposition Members will be as brief as I have been.

10.26 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I shall not detain the House too long.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) mentioned new facts being put before him, but they should be put before the Leader of the House, in whose gift many of the changes lie. The right hon. Gentleman has yet to resolve the question of which the Chairman of the Committee of Selection is aware and which is the basis for tonight's debate.

I understand that the debate is narrow, but when such changes are proposed, it is worth questioning the reason for changing the membership of Select Committees. We should question the qualifications of the new members and what contributions they will make. It might be appropriate for the House to suggest subjects for consideration by Select Committees. It is possible to discuss such matters under the terms of the motions.

We must also consider the lack of departmental Committees for Scotland and for Northern Ireland. If nothing is being done to remedy that, it is right to cross-examine and question the Chairman of the Committee of Selection about those important points. The Select Committees on Education, Science and Arts, on Home Affairs and on the Environment have no Scottish Members. It is true, however, that the Select Committees on Energy and Defence each have two Scots Members —that is Scots representing Scottish constituencies—while one Scots Member is a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. These are important facts to bear in mind when we are considering appointing new Members to Select Committees. It is unfortunate that not one of the Members proposed represents a Scottish constituency.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): I have followed carefully the hon. Gentleman's argument. Is he aware that geographical considerations, and even the consideration of party membership, do not reflect only complaints that can be addressed to the way in which Members are selected for membership of Select Committees? There is a paucity of representation of certain political strands of opinion, even within parties, in the selection of those who serve on Select Committees. That will never be admitted but it is a fact.

Mr. Kirkwood: These are extra complexities—they were never known to me—that will add to the difficulties of the Chairman of the Committee of Selection. They constitute another reason why the Chairman should have a discussion with the Leader of the House. Surely the Committee of Selection should discuss some of the grievances that are held by Conservative Members in addition to some of those that I am suggesting that we should consider.

Surely we are entitled also to consider the relative merits of alternative nominees. I suggest humbly that I might be considered as a member of some of the Committees, but by no means all of them. I readily defer to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who is a well-known defence expert. I say that as one who watches "Newsnight" each night. He has Leuchars air base in his constituency and he is a man who knows a tactical air-to-surface missile when he sees one. I defer with great ease and facility to the greater knowledge and experience of defence matters of my hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Perhaps the Committee of Selection will take into account the lamentable representation of the minority parties on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. A member of a minority party has failed to attend that Committee for almost three years continuously. I have been engaged in correspondence with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) for at least two years, asking whether the minority parties will provide a representative for a Committee which everyone in the House agrees is an important scrutiny Committee to control Ministers.

Mr. Kirkwood: I agree. Each place on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments is an important one. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) is not responsible in any party-political sense for the hon. Member to whom the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) refers. He should take up the matter directly with those who are concerned. We are talking about the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes).

I was arguing my case to be considered for membership of six or seven Committees. As someone who was born and bred in Scotland, I have an admirable pair of qualifications, surely, for membership of six of the Committees in the context of the debate.

One of the principal reasons for debating the motions is that the Select Committee on the Environment is precluded from considering some of the important issues that obtain north of the border. The one that immediately comes to mind is the disposal of nuclear waste. Some of the proposals that are being brought forward are causing much controversy, heartache and soul-searching north of the border. As things stand, the Committee is constrained within the remit of the Department of the Environment, which is responsible for matters south of the border. I know, of course, that the Committee has been doing some excellent work in the preparation of reports, including that on Nirex, that are important north of the border. It is engaged in an inquiry on the landfill of waste and one on the pollution of beaches. It is also conducting an inquiry into eco-labelling. It has recently prepared an important report on the main estimates for the Property Services Agency. All those matters are important, but they relate exclusively to issues that are south of the border and they have no bearing on what is happening in Scotland.

It is important that in this debate we convince the Chairman of the Committee of Selection that if we cannot have departmental Select Committees to deal with issues affecting Northern Ireland and Scotland, he must take urgent steps to place hon. Members representing Scottish and Northern Ireland seats on the other Select Committees and he must also prevail on the Committee Chairmen to go north of the border, consider subjects that are important north of the border and report on those issues. In that way what is happening in Northern Ireland and Scotland can be considered.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring with such approval to some of the reports that my Committee, the Select Committee on the Environment, has published. However, he missed our report on Northern Ireland. We conducted an inquiry there which was well received in Northern Ireland. My Committee's remit is the remit of the Department of the Environment as constituted here. We could therefore go to Northern Ireland. However, even placing a Scots Member on my Committee would not enable it to carry out an inquiry in Scotland; that is another matter altogether. I should like to have a Scots Member on my Committee and if one were to give his name to the Chairman of the Selection Committee, that would encourage me.

However, with regard to the minority parties, I had a Liberal Member on my Committee until 1986 when he became the Liberal party Chief Whip. We kept that place empty for the rest of that Parliament, but no one came forward to fill it. We were disappointed that the minority

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

parties were not anxious to fill that place. Since then, the Committee has been composed entirely of Conservative and Labour Members, because we decided that it was impossible to ask anyone else to come forward.

Mr. Kirkwood: I pay tribute to and acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's distinguished service as Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment. However, he does not understand the difficulties that we face. The hon. Member to whom he referred who relinquished his place on the Environment Committee was obliged to do that because we were offered, and then chose to take up, one of the number of places to which we are constrained on another Select Committee. He had to come off so that we could get someone else on to another Committee. We do not have the luxury of simply coming off a Committee. We have to deploy our resources as best we can and that applies to other minority parties.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said that he would dearly love to have a Scots Member on his Committee. Here I am. I humbly offer myself and my experience. I modestly offer to be a diligent attender. There may be a division on one, if not three, of the motions and I hope that the hon. Gentleman gets his way. He may even vote for me.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): With respect to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and without impugning his versatility or modesty, if he wants to spread his resources among the Committees, why has an amendment been tabled to place him on the Treasury and Civil Service Committee which already has a Liberal Member?

Mr. Kirkwood: Berwick-upon-Tweed used to be part of Scotland and we still have territorial ambitions in that direction. Perhaps the answer to the problem is that we should annex Berwick-upon-Tweed as that would give us a Scottish Member on the Treasury and Civil Service Committee. However, that is a slightly roundabout way of achieving our end. There are more direct ways of getting Scottish Members on to Select Committees.

Scottish Members on Select Committees is very much the second best. I am not arguing for additional Scottish Members so that a Scottish flavour and tone can be brought to the deliberations; I am putting forward these points because they are my only means of trying to force the Leader of the House to implement the Standing Orders. Technically, he is in breach of the Standing Orders as he has not put forward names for Select Committees to deal with Scottish affairs and with Northern Ireland affairs.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman says that he has no option. I thought that all was now sweetness and light between the Liberal Democrats and the Tories. In the past few days the leader of the Liberal Democrats has been saying that, as the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is no longer the leader of the Conservatives, things between their two parties are different.

Mr. Kirkwood: Let the hon. Gentleman come to our next conference.

Mr. Skinner: Is the hon. Gentleman telling us that all that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said the other day does not mean anything? Is his party still falling out with the Tories? We want to know.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am tempted to stray out of order. If the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wants to come to our next conference I shall pay for his day ticket. If he listens to what is actually said, he will not have to make it up on the hoof. Of course, he is merely trying to score points.

Mr. Gorst: How will the hon. Gentleman cope if the votes go in his favour and he is elected to all the Committees? I put the question not as a disaffected, non-selected Member, but out of interest.

Mr. Kirkwood: I shall cross that bridge when I come to it. I am very willing to learn. I am young, fit and eager for experience. It will be time enough to start worrying when I am elected to all the Committees.

Scots Members have a record of assistance to Select Committees. Two of the most formative experiences of my life are relevant to this debate. I attended a comprehensive school—Cranhill senior secondary—in the east end of Glasgow. The hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), who was there at the same time, has just told me that the school is about to be closed. I could indeed bring some interesting educational experience to bear on the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee. Having graduated from Heriot-Watt university—I took a BSc in pharmacy—I became a Member of this House. A few weeks later the right hon. Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke)—now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but then a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department of Education and Science—announced that the school of pharmacy at Heriot-Watt was to be closed, on the ground that the quality of the graduates was not high enough. Thus, my combined school and university experience has certainly provided me with something to say in the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee. In addition, I have played in pop groups, so I could contribute to debates on the arts. We used to get 27s 6d for playing at scout hall gigs on Friday nights. A panoply of experience could be brought to the deliberations of these Committees, of which the Education, Science and Arts Committee is but one.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman has insight and experience in a wide range of the subjects with which the Select Committees deal. Does he agree that, important as the work of these Committees is, the really important scrutiny must be done by a Scottish Select Committee and Northern Ireland Select Committee, as Scottish affairs and Northern Ireland affairs are two areas of government in respect of which this House is not scrutinising Government action properly?

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman states the case very succinctly.

I do not need to say very much more. I do not take any pleasure in saying to the Leader of the House—it is not meant as a warning—that the motions that are tabled every time the membership of a Select Committee changes will be used by us for the purpose of making the point that matters pertaining to education and science in Scotland

and in Northern Ireland are not being considered as thoroughly as are such matters as they affect other parts of the United Kingdom.

In particular, the Energy Select Committee has direct relevance to what is going on in the North sea. The Environment Committee and the Home Department Committee examine matters south of the border. I refer also to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, the Defence Select Committee and the Foreign Affairs Select Committee which are crucial in respect of public policy. At the moment they have the luxury of scrutinising the work of Departments south of the border. That opportunity does not exist in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Every time the Government try to change the membership of Committees, the same device and procedure will be used so that hon. Members who seek to serve on Committees, let alone come off Committees, will have to sit and listen to half an hour or longer of debate. Perhaps Divisions will take the odd 15 minutes here or there. That will happen time after time until the Government get it into their heads that the situation will not change to any great degree after the next general election. The Government of the day, of whichever party, will have to face the difficulty in future.

There are alternatives. The Joint Select Committees are looking for English hon. Members who are Scots born and have bona fide interests in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. The Government are not examining those matters properly and urgently, and the House of Commons will have to consider changes time after time until they do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) had to say, but never once did he indicate to me or for the purposes of the *Official Report* that he was moving an amendment, and I cannot propose the amendment until he moves it. Will he now do so?

Mr. Kirkwood: I beg to move, as an amendment to the Question, to leave out 'Mr. Patrick Thompson' and insert 'Mr. Archy Kirkwood'.

10.46 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was so overcome with modesty that he omitted one important point, which is that the Select Committee on Procedure considered this matter in October last year. In its report, it made it quite clear that the initiative for putting the matter right lay with the Leader of the House. I understand that there is a convention that the Government should respond to Select Committee reports within three months. The Leader of the House and the Government have not responded to that Select Committee report. The right hon. Gentleman is doubly in dereliction of his duty and should tell us what he will do in response to that Select Committee report on this important matter.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that he was formally moving the amendment to motion No. 12, which Mr. Speaker selected for debate. You read out, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) cannot do that until later. He moved the amendment to motion No. 10 on education, science and arts. I have that very clear.

10.47 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that he was concerned about hon. Members from Scotland being on Committees. Of course, several hon. Members from Scotland represent the Labour party on Committees. Truth to tell, if we examine the amendments, we shall find that they represent not so much Scotland as the Liberal party. Although I can understand the desire of the minority parties to have representation on Select Committees, as I said earlier, with the Joint Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, which I chair, representation by minority parties has not been too successful. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) disclaimed any responsibility for the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), from a minority party, who has not attended the Committee for several years. When that hon. Member's name was put forward, it was at the request of the minority parties that an hon. Member should be placed on the Joint Select Committee of Statutory Instruments. Naturally, the Committee that I chair turned to the minority parties and the Whip of the largest minority party to ask for a replacement so that the membership of the Committee should not be burdened by an absentee.

It is true that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments is not a glamorous part of parliamentary work. It does not have television coverage. That is not because of any lack of desire for it on the part of the Committee members; it is simply that no televison channel wants to go to the Committee to record its proceedings. Therefore, it remains a relatively obscure and hidden part of the work of Parliament.

I should have thought that, under the terms of the Standing Order that established the Joint Select Committee and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, the description entirely accorded with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire—it is an absolutely crucial sector of public policy. The Joint Select Committee was created in order to scrutinise Ministers who had been granted powers under primary legislation to ensure that they do not abuse their powers, the huge volume of delegated legislation—more than 2,000 statutory instruments and regulations every year—are intra vires, within the Minister's power, their drafting is clear, they do not contain ambiguities, make unusual use of powers or contain any retrospective provison when the primary legislation does not do so. All of those issues are important to Parliament and provide some safeguard and scrutiny for the people of our country. Ministerial powers should be curtailed where there is any possibility of abuse.

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, unglamorous and obscure though it is, was established because, in the past, Ministers have exceeded and abused their powers. I can well recall that the Joint Committee made a report about the powers of officers to collect information for the Scottish poll tax that clearly exceeded the powers of the primary legislation and was the subject

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

of a heated debate in the Chamber, when the Opposition spokesmen made a powerful case to show that the Government were riding roughshod over citizens' rights and exceeding the powers of primary legislation.

It seems curious that the Liberal Whip should repudiate someone who was put on a Committee with the Liberals' agreement, when they were friends and waved to each other, albeit from separate buses. Now, they have stopped waving to each other and go, not just in separate buses, but on separate trains and keep well away from each other except to exchange an occasional scowl. It seems that the Liberal Whip cannot evade responsibility for that original action. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland knows, I have made several approaches to him, the latest of which was that if any of the minority parties cannot provide a Member for the Select Committee, the Labour party would be pleased to do so because it is keen to exercise scrutiny on behalf of the citizens of this country.

Mr. Wallace: The Chairman of the Committee of Selection is present and I am sure that he will correct me if I am wrong. The Joint Select Committee on Statutory Instruments is set up not by the Selection Committee, but by the House, and has been doing a good job without the help of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). Does the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) have been nominated to all the Committees, not so that an additional minority party is represented, but because we needed the consent of the Members involved to table the motions? Nothing would have pleased me more than to submit the name of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), but I was unable to do so. The point we are trying to make is that the absence of Scots Tories holds up the Scottish Select Committee—we are using this device to raise that issue.

Mr. Cryer: It is a particularly poor device in view of the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman's party has created for one Select Committee—*[Interruption.]* As you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be prepared to acknowledge, if I may continue without the continuous heckling that is going on behind me—something that is entirely within the traditions of the House—the Chamber establishes all Select Committees, including the Committee of Selection, and all Select Committees are responsible to the Chamber. The parallel that I draw tonight is absolutely apt and accurate. In the midst of some vicious heckling from the Liberal Democrats—their smooth face has fallen tonight so that we can see the viciousness and the political chicanery that go on beneath that facade—I want to make the point that if the Liberal Democrats wish to make a case for an extension to Select Committees, they should have a good record themselves. That is palpably not the case. It is fair for the House to take such a record into account.

10.54 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) did not realise that he was unwittingly ambushing a united attempt by Scottish Members to get something done about the lack of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. That was the whole purpose of tabling the amendments. Scottish Labour Members support that attempt.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): It would have helped if the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) had made some reference to that point in his speech.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did so, as *Hansard* will show. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South was getting some heckling from behind, he should have been puzzled by the satisfied smiles of Conservative Members. He has given them some arguments to bolster their own case, although not successfully. The reason why we are taking up the time of the House is to highlight the enormous injustice to Scotland of not having a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, although other Committees cover all the other Departments and work of the House—except Northern Ireland and Scotland.

There is a perfect attendance tonight by all the women Scottish Members. There is nothing unusual about that, yet only one woman, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), is a member of a Select Committee. The hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) talked about the criteria for selection for Committees. He mentioned geography, party composition and the possibility of someone standing within the parties. He did not mention whether any effort was made to provide a fair balance of women Members. That is another issue which I am willing to take up, for its own sake and as another means of drawing the House's attention to the lack of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. I hope that there will be a fair balance of women Members on such a Committee when we manage to achieve it.

Mr. Gorst: The hon. Lady has slightly misunderstood my intervention. I tried to get across the point that the Liberal Democrats addressed themselves to the criteria that the hon. Lady has enumerated, but that one heard little about liberalism, non-conformity and an approach to the facts rather than party-political criteria. Those are often lacking in the approach of the Committee of Selection—or at least some members of it. That is my complaint. I should have been more inclined to support the Liberal Democrats if they had made it their complaint.

Mrs. Fyfe: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that when the Government concede this matter of justice and finally let us have a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, if my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and his colleagues have anything to do with it, the Committee will be full of reason, justice, truth and light, and will have every possible quality that one could imagine. [HON. MEMBERS: "And women."] Yes, it has a fair proportion of women and that will help to ensure that it has all those qualities.

Until the Government provide a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Lady and other hon. Members that we are not discussing the non-existence of a Select Committee. We are discussing the motion and the amendment. I am sure that the hon. Lady will oblige me, keep within the procedures of the House and discuss what is on the Order Paper.

Mrs. Fyfe: I believe that this is relevant to the motion —*[Laughter.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should like to hear the hon. Lady, not the laughter of hon. Members below the Gangway.

Mrs. Fyfe: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In conclusion, I thought that my remarks were entirely relevant to the issue because the amendments would not have been tabled without that concern, on which Scottish Members are united. These matters will continue to be pressed until we succeed.

11 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I start with a rather obvious point that I would not normally make, although it is often factually correct. I refer to the total absence from this debate of any hon. Member from the Scottish Conservative party.

There is no doubt that one of the underlying causes of the motion is the refusal of hon. Members who represent Scottish seats in the Tory interest to serve on a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. Their absence is a mark of considerable disrespect, because although I know that some of them were in the House this evening, none has come into the Chamber now either to listen to the debate or to put a point of view. It is also disappointing that no representative from the Scottish Office is on the Front Bench—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) wishes to make a point, she may do so by intervening.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Since Scotland is not mentioned on the Order Paper, I can see nothing odd about that.

Mr. Dewar: If the hon. Lady will listen to the argument being unfolded——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am.

Mr. Dewar: I am delighted to hear that—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Scotland is not mentioned on the Order Paper.

Mr. Dewar: I have not, Madam Deputy Speaker, felt so affrighted since I was in primary school.

Serious matters are at stake. This debate is part of a continuing argument of real significance to those involved in the Select Committee system and to the Committee of Selection. The absences that I have referred to are unfortunate. I am also disappointed because I understand that the Leader of the House does not intend to enter the debate. Although there is a constitutional theory that the Leader of the House has nothing to do with these matters, none of us is naive enough to believe that or so to undervalue the right hon. Gentleman's activities among his colleagues.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman is understating his case. It is not a question of a constitutional convention. I repeat that the Select Committee on Procedure has particularly charged that the Leader of the House must try to resolve this matter, but he has not.

Mr. Dewar: It is extremely uncharacteristic of me to understate my case. I am astonished at my own modesty, and am delighted to be corrected. It is a fair point. As I remember, there was some trenchant criticism from the Select Committee on Procedure about the failure to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. It is remarkable that we are only now beginning to tempt—as I see from the body language opposite me—the Leader of the House to break his Trappist vows. I gladly give way to him.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I do not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hurray."] I must advise the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) that I do not remember any Trappist vows. The reason for my not seeking to speak in the debate is simple. I am obeying your injunction, Madam Deputy Speaker, because some of the points that have been raised are entirely irrelevant to the debate and to my position. It is a matter for my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox). At the appropriate time I shall, of course, respond to the Select Committee on Procedure, but that is not an issue this evening.

Mr. Dewar: Well, perhaps I shall be able to persuade the right hon. Gentleman that that is a mistaken impression.

I must welcome the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) who, in a cloud of dust and good intention, has arrived on the Treasury Bench. I doubt whether his presence will do us any good, but I am glad to see him there.

I make it clear that, among Labour Members at least, there is no animus towards the hon. Members whose progress out of and into Select Committees we are attempting to block tonight. No one is throwing aspersions on their character or competence. I hope that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) will not misunderstand if I also stress that we do not necessarily imply that he has superior or particularly valuable qualifications for the work of the Environment or any other Select Committee, but he has one qualification which seems extremely relevant: he represents a Scottish constituency. It is perhaps an accident of geography or a peculiarity of the Scottish system that he has been elected in Roxburgh and Berwickshire, but he has been elected.

The point of the motion is that there are real reasons why we should artificially reinforce the Scottish membership of the Select Committees. That is not an argument that I would normally sustain. In a way it is an odd argument, I understand entirely why the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst), who has risen on several occasions, is antipathetic to that argument, but it is an important argument and it is justified by the strange fact, in the Select Committee system, that the Scottish Affairs Select Committee has not made its appearance, for reasons that we understand.

It would not be possible to move the motion, in defiance of the advice of the Committee of Selection, if the Scottish Affairs Select Committee had not failed to appear and if it was scrutinising the work of the Scottish Office. That is the kernel of the case for removing the hon. Members who have been proposed by the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir

[Mr. Dewar]

M. Fox) and his colleagues and substituting that ever willing workhorse, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire.

There is a certain air of good nature about these proceedings, but no one should underestimate the strength of feeling on the issue, the sense of grievance about the parliamentary machinery and the lack of a Scottish Affairs Select Committee and the remarkable gap that exists. I recognise that there is a tendency among Conservative Members to shrug off the absence of a Scottish Affairs Select Committee and, therefore, to devalue the positive case for the substitution that we seek to make, but that is a mistake.

I would be open to the argument that we should not press the motion if I were convinced that there were ways in which we could set up a Scottish Affairs Select Committee, which would remove the need for the artificial reinforcement represented by the motion. I do not wish to labour the point, but I am satisfied that for many years we have done everything that we can within the rules of the House to persuade the Government, the Committee of Selection and Conservative Members to moderate their view and set up the Select Committee. It is because we have failed to make progress that there is a strong case for the substitution that we seek to make.

We have offered to reduce the number of members of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee, which was originally the largest Select Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is discussing a Select Committee which does not exist, a matter to which I have already drawn attention. I should be glad if the hon. Gentleman would direct his comments to the amendment and the main motion.

Mr. Dewar: I do not intend to deal with the Select Committe on Statutory Instruments, &c., for example, or any of the other Committees that I could discuss, which are not mentioned in the motion. I am entirely in your hands, Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]*—or arms, if Madam Deputy Speaker wants, but there would be no case for the motion if there were a Scottish Affairs Select Committee. There would be no strong case for the motion if there was a genuine opportunity to establish such a Committee or to persuade the powers that be that there should be a Scottish Affairs Select Committee.

I merely wish to explain—it might be a matter of contention—why I at least am satisfied that there is no way to proceed other than by the tactics represented by the amendment. I was simply making the point—I shall not dwell on it, Madam Deputy Speaker—that we have made every concession that we reasonably can on the numbers on the Committee, and by accepting representatives from non-Scottish seats and one-off ad hoc Committees to consider a specific and important matter of interest in Scotland. We have in vain made several such concessions.

I wish to clear up a slight dispute to which reference was made in recent weeks. I am aware of only one occasion when the Labour party baulked at a suggestion which, it was said, might clear the way for a Scottish Affairs Select Committee. The authorities suggested to me that if I were prepared to waive the Standing Order that demanded that there should be 16 Scots on Scottish Standing Committees considering Scottish Bills, thus relieving the burden on Conservative Back Benchers, something might be possible. That was interesting, because it implied that, if the right bribe were taken, it would be possible to form a Scottish Affairs Select Committee.

I did not believe that it was right to go down that road. Short of that, we have offered every conceivable concession that we could responsibly offer. We have got nowhere. That is why we are considering motion No. 12 and why Labour Members believe that that approach should be pursued tonight and in future when the opportunity arises.

There is another reason why the motion has considerable substance. I pray in aid not only the present Leader of the House but his predecessor, now Secretary of State for Energy. We have been told more than once that we do not need to worry too much or to mourn the absence of a Scottish Affairs Select Committee because Scottish Members serve on other Select Committees which can do valuable and useful work considering Scottish issues.

The implication is that we should use other Select Committees to form a surrogate scrutiny machine and ensure that there is Scottish representation on them. Taking the advice of the Leader of the House, it is not unreasonable, therefore, to believe that what perhaps in normal circumstances would be seen as a preponderance of Scottish Members on other Select Committees is justified in these special circumstances. That is the purpose of the motions.

The Leader of the House mentioned the Public Accounts Committee. I heard tonight from one or two of its members that the Committee was thinking of considering a particular Scottish subject. Of course I welcome that, but it is a limited approach. The Chairman of the Environment Select Committee—the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi)—said that there are often difficulties in defining the remit. That makes Scottish subjects difficult or even impossible to tackle.

As I am sure that you are aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, within the past day or two, we have had a Department of Trade and Industry report dealing with the Scottish steel industry, particularly the vexed issue of Ravenscraig. Strangely, we proposed that specific, one-off subject for a special Scottish Affairs Select Committee, but it was turned down by the Government authorities. The report was useful. It established beyond peradventure that, according to the evidence, the Department of Trade and Industry had been totally inactive in promoting the cause of the Scottish steel industry. We were given extremely interesting information about the way in which the Scottish Office laid down——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is straying far from what I see on my copy of the Order Paper.

Mr. Dewar: I am certainly prepared to heed your words, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): With great respect, I recommend that the hon. Gentleman read the report. Its recommendations are very different from what he says.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not concerned with that report. I have just made that point.

Mr. Dewar: I apologise if I have entered a note of controversy into the proceedings, for that was not my

intention. The last thing that I want is to quarrel with the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, who produced an excellent and extremely helpful report——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not eulogise about a Select Committee report to which the Order Paper makes no reference.

Mr. Dewar: I thought that there was always room in the House for the occasional gracious pleasantry, but I see no percentage in flattering the hon. Gentleman. I leave that matter because I am confident that there will be a debate soon in Government time on the Floor of the House, as the Committee recommends. I know that the Chairman of the Select Committee and I will make common cause on at least that point.

Perhaps I was misled, Madam Deputy Speaker, because although there have been one or two useful Scottish reports from other Select Committees, they cannot play the role of a surrogate Scottish Committee that examines the Scottish Office as required. If there is to be any hope of getting useful service out of those Committees, it is not unreasonable to seek proper representation of Scottish Members on them. I refer to representation not only of the Liberal Democrats—as I am sure they would be the first to agree—but of all the other parties as well.

I therefore take the view that we should support the general drive, thrust and intention of the motion. Perhaps I should leave it there—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I recognise that there is a certain restlessness on the Conservative Benches as such arguments are deployed. I stress that that is so of the Conservative Benches, because I know that there is no restlessness elsewhere.

I hope that this will not be taken as a threat, but late night sittings such as this are likely to become a feature of the remainder of this parliamentary Session. There exists a good deal of justified anger, and in those circumstances it is unreasonable for the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) to expect such measures to pass through the House without scrutiny or challenge. Although he made a charmingly brief speech, the hon. Gentleman was a little flippant, and I hope that he will think again.

The Leader of the House made it clear that he does not believe that he can shift, but I hope that he will indicate whether—to follow the logic of his own argument about the role of other Select Committees in the absence of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs—he has some sympathy with the arguments advanced by hon. Members on this side of the House.

Selection is always a difficult business. I was interested to hear interventions about the dangers of making selections on a geographical or party basis. That is a naive objection. At one point, we suggested that we could easily establish a Select Committee on the basis that it has no Conservative majority. The Conservatives seemed to think the matters in question were very important——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is again going wide of the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Dewar: That was an aside, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There have been enough asides tonight. I shall be grateful if the hon. Member will refer to the motion before the House.

Mr. Dewar: I was just finishing, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try hard not to get my second wind on the basis of interventions or advice.

I accept the difficulties, but there is a genuine point of geographical substance that is not pork barrelling or a narrow point of the kind that the hon. Member for Shipley fears. We are making a genuine attempt to build into the system a safeguard and a scrutiny mechanism for Scotland —of which it has been deprived through a series of shabby and unfortunate circumstances. On that basis, I hope that the House will view with sympathy the suggested changes that the motion incorporates.

Amendment negatived,

Main Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Gerald Bowden be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mr. Patrick Thompson be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ENERGY

Ordered,

That Mr. Malcom Moss be discharged from the Energy Committee and Mr. Cecil Franks be added to the Committee. —*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ENVIRONMENT

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Keith Mans and Mr. Robin Squire be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Ralph Howell, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Hugo Summerson be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Amendment proposed to the Question, to leave out 'Mr. Ralph Howell' and insert 'Mr. Archy Kirkwood'.—*[Mr. Kirkwood.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 44, Noes 123.

Division No. 99] **[11.20 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Alton, David	McKelvey, William
Barron, Kevin	Maclennan, Robert
Beith, A. J.	McMaster, Gordon
Bellotti, David	Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Maxton, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Meale, Alan
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Carr, Michael	Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Clelland, David	Moonie, Dr Lewis
Cryer, Bob	Pike, Peter L.
Dalyell, Tam	Prescott, John
Darling, Alistair	Reid, Dr John
Dewar, Donald	Rowlands, Ted
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*	Skinner, Dennis
Fearn, Ronald	Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*	Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Foulkes, George	Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Fyfe, Maria	Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Worthington, Tony
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*	
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Janner, Greville	**Mr. James Wallace and**
Kennedy, Charles	**Mr. Archy Kirkwood.**

NOES

Amess, David	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Arbuthnot, James	Brazier, Julian
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bright, Graham
Atkins, Robert	Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Baldry, Tony	Burns, Simon
Bellingham, Henry	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Bevan, David Gilroy	Carrington, Matthew

Chapman, Sydney
Cboope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony (Wyre F'rest)
Cope, Rt Hon John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David (Welwyn Hatf'd)
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael (Stirling)
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John (Ryedale)
Gregory, Conal
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil (Tatton)
Harris, David
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Mrs Maureen (Wolv' NE)
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. (Cannock & B'wd)
Howell, Ralph (North Norfolk)
Hughes, Robert G. (Harrow W)
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger (B'ham N'thfield)
King, Rt Hon Tom (Bridgwater)
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew (E Berkshire)
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John (Hendon S)
Martin, David (Portsmouth S)
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mitchell, Andrew (Gedling)
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David (Taunton)
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir James (Dorset W)
Squire, Robin
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan (Eastwood)
Stewart, Andy (Sherwood)
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian (Esher)
Taylor, John M (Solihull)
Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles (Bexhill)
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George (Acton)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to,

Home Affairs

Ordered,

That Mr. Ivor Stanbrook be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr. David Sumberg be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Treasury and Civil Service

Ordered,

That Mr. Charles Wardle be discharged from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and Sir Richard Luce be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Defence

Ordered,

That Mr. Jonathan Sayeed be discharged from the Defence Committee and Mr. Michael Knowles be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Foreign Affairs

Ordered,

That Mr. William Powell be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr. David Harris be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Homelessness (Leicester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

11.32 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment the very serious and growing issue of homelessness in the city of Leicester. I refer not only to families and single people who have nowhere to live but to the effect that the homelessness of these people has on others who desperately need housing but who cannot get it because such diminishing housing as there is goes as a priority to the homeless.

This is a growing problem. It is getting worse all the time, and it has grown seriously in the past few months. It is estimated that there are between 200 and 400 homeless people in Leicester, the majority of whom are single homeless, but there are homeless families. The number of young homeless people has grown from a small percentage to between 30 and 40 per cent. They are entitled to homes and the local authority is under an obligation to house them.

At Christmas, I visited Knighton house, where marvellous volunteers were looking after people who otherwise would have been sleeping rough, probably in the parks, over Christmas. Yesterday, I again visited Knighton house and Border house in my constituency and a hostel for the homeless in Loughborough road. I pay tribute to the professionals from the homeless unit of the city council, people from Night Shelter and individuals such as my friend Lawrie Simpkin who devote their time as volunteers to serving homeless people.

They are doing their best, but in all the homes and hostels for the homeless that I have visited I have found a deep sense of frustration. When I asked them, "What would you like me to talk about in Parliament, where your voice can be heard only through me?", I received the same answer each time: "We need resources, money, places for people to play, sleep and work and help, but we are not getting it."

The effect of that on families and on people who demand homes but cannot get them is devastating. It escalates like a waterfall of suffering; it is a spiral of homelessness. At the top of the housing pile is the city council whose job it is to provide houses. Unfortunately, since they took office, the Government have effectively prevented council house building, so there is no new stock. At the same time, they have instituted the right to buy, so that the number of available houses has shrunk. They have prevented councils that have sold their houses from using the money they obtained to maintain and improve houses or to build new houses. Only 20 per cent. of that money may be used for such purposes.

There are fewer houses because none are being built and because people have the right to buy them, and homelessness is growing because of people's desperate need to rent houses as they cannot afford to buy. Such people were on the housing list before, but they are being joined by people whose homes have been repossessed because they cannot pay their mortgages as they are out of work. Some of those people were former council tenants who were encouraged to buy their homes but now cannot afford to pay for them.

What is the council doing? It is providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It costs £33 a week to cover the rent, water rates and poll tax on a council house, but it costs £40 a night to put someone in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That is not only wasteful of human resources and causes misery to the people involved but is financially mad.

When the council has placed people into temporary accommodation, it is its duty to provide them with homes. That means that, whenever homes become available, they are given to homeless people, while those on the housing list have to wait. As a result, the housing list is becoming longer. On 13 March, there were 10,656 applicants. That means that 30,000 to 35,000 people are waiting for a home, and some of them will be living in desperately overcrowded conditions. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) will know, as I do, that our mail bags and surgeries are full of complaints from those who are desperate for housing, which they badly need but cannot obtain.

There are 10,656 applicants on the waiting list and there are 3,256 on the transfer list. If, two years ago, people wanted accommodation on the New Parks estate, for example, in my constituency, they would wait for nine to 12 months. The waiting list now could be three to four years. Young people who marry cannot afford homes. How are they meant to live? People are living with their in-laws or their parents. These people are living in desperately overcrowded conditions. There may be two rooms, but they have three or four children. I am speaking of husbands and wives living together, single-parent families and elderly people. The suffering stretches across the community.

Homelessness is a problem for not only the homeless. It is a problem for those who have homes but need better or different ones. There is also a problem for those who are trying to help and to serve. As I have said, there is a problem for the entire community. If we as a "decent" society cannot provide homes for people who are without money—people who cannot get jobs, people who are disadvantaged—we are a rotten society. The trouble is that our society is becoming more rotten every day as disadvantage spreads and poor people become poorer. More people are dispossessed, with the result that there are more and more repossessions. Those who are looking after the homeless in Leicester told me yesterday that in the past eight months the problem has burgeoned. I do not understand why the Minister finds that funny, but he seems to do so. It is one of the tragedies of our time that there is such homelessness. It is the inevitable result of a rotten housing policy that is produced by a Government who do not understand the needs of ordinary people. Above all, they do not understand the needs of those who desperately require homes.

I challenge the Minister—I am sure that he would help personally if he could do so—to visit Knighton house, Border house and shelters for the homeless generally in Leicester and to listen to those who are trying to serve. I challenge him to spare time on his rounds, wherever he goes, for a visit to Leicester. If he does so, he will understand why I am so pleased to have had a brief opportunity this evening to put before the House the needs of my constituents and others. I am speaking of the needs of the homeless in Leicester, and those needs are becoming more acute daily. We need resources, understanding and care from the Government and from those who are responsible for housing within the machinery of government. I call for action now.

11.43 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on raising an issue of interest in Leicester, but one which is of national importance. I agree with him that the despair which he sees at his surgery, and which I see at mine, must be seen by Ministers and many other Tory Members. I pay tribute to the professionals and non-professionals who do so much in Leicester to try to ameliorate some of the worst effects of homelessness.

I reinforce the point made by my hon. and learned Friend. The Government cannot escape their responsibility for the causes of homelessness or their refusal to act to remove them. It is clear that Leicester's responsibility to house the homeless must inevitably mean that other people will be on the waiting lists for longer. That problem has been exacerbated during the past 10 years by the Government's refusal to allow local authorities to build more homes. I am sure that the Minister for Housing and Planning will be aware from his visits around London, before he rejoined the Government that local authorities statutory obligation to house the homeless inevitably causes resentment among people on waiting lists as they see their chances of obtaining a new home in a reasonable time recede.

I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend agrees that, as an immediate step towards removing some of the problems arising from homelessness, the Government should restore to local authorities the freedom to build more houses. Local authorities would then be better able to fulfil their legal obligation to house the homeless. Such a step would also offer some hope in the short to medium term to people who want a home in the public sector, but are denied one as a direct consequence of Government policy towards the building of new council houses.

11.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on raising on the Adjournment this important subject. It may be helpful if I describe the background of the Government's housing policy before I consider the specific points relating to Leicester.

The Government are committed to making good housing available to everyone. During our term of office, home ownership has risen from 57 per cent. to 68 per cent. of the population. Over the same period, 2 million new houses have been built and the number of dwellings per thousand of the population has increased by 8 per cent. At the same time, quality has improved. The number of unfit dwellings fell between 1981 and 1986—the date of the last survey—from 1·14 million to 1·05 million. During the same period the number of dwellings lacking basic amenities almost halved.

Funding is also being more carefully targeted. The rising programme of housing association new build, expanded considerably by the use of mixed funding arrangements, is aimed at the areas of greatest need. For the longer term, our policies will also revive the private rented sector, despite the efforts, I am sorry to say, of the Opposition over many years to undermine that important element in any workable housing market.

Our enlarged estate action programme, raised from £190 million to £270 million in the coming year, ensures that priority goes to improving the worst estates. It also ensures that those improvements give the best possible value for money. The new private sector improvement grant system is designed to ensure that resources are directed to the poorest people living in the worst conditions, while active home improvement agency services make sure that it reaches them.

It is against that improving background that the problem of homelessness should be seen—a problem which affects countries abroad as well as Britain. The problem arises from many different causes, including the generation gap, the breakdown of relationships in families, and the demand of young people for greater freedom and independence. Housebuilding is only part of the answer. Personal economic independence is just as important, and here the whole range of Government policies are relevant.

On the housing front, we have to begin with the worst aspects of the problem. Those sleeping rough, with no kind of shelter, are obviously a top priority. In London, we have a special £96 million programme now under way—the hon. Gentleman will be well aware of it—to provide additional hostel places and longer-term move-on accommodation. Six hundred hostel places and 900 places in move-on schemes will come on stream over the next few months, with substantially more expected over the next two years. I mention this because we are aware that a number of the people who are sleeping rough in London do not originate in the capital. We have targeted our present efforts on London, where the problem of rough sleeping is most acute, but we will be considering how the initiative can be extended to other parts of the country in the future, with the help of voluntary organisations.

We are similarly concerned for those who present themselves to local authorities as being statutorily homeless. The most acute problems are in London and in the south-east. Here, we are spending £300 million over this year and next year to increase the amount of rented housing that is available. Our aim is to reduce the need for local authorities to make bed-and-breakfast accommodation available to homeless families by increasing the number of lettings available to the homeless. Priority is being given to getting empty local authority and housing association property back into use and to the release of tenanted property by using cash incentives to encourage better-off tenants to move into owner-occupation. Our aim is to provide 15,000 units over the two years.

We are tackling the wider national problem on a range of fronts. Housing management is vital—a point to which I shall return in a moment—and we are introducing a number of performance indicators to encourage the best practice. High rent arrears represent funding opportunities forgone, and high void rates condemn people to homelessness quite unnecessarily.

How local authorities administer the legislation on homelessness is also important. We are revising the code of guidance to provide clearer advice and fairer treatment for those who apply as being homeless. The consultation draft was warmly welcomed by both the local authority associations and voluntary groups working with the homeless. We hope to publish the revised code around the beginning of May. We also take careful account of homelessness in allocating spending resources under the housing investment programme, and both the general needs index and housing needs index used to allocate resources have been revised this year.

We recognise that short-term leasing can sometimes have a part to play. We have therefore made arrangements to permit local authorities that apply to us to operate short-term leasehold accommodation outside the housing revenue account and thereby avail themselves of a more favourable financial regime.

I turn now to the specific problem of Leicester. Leicester's homelessness problem has, I know, increased recently. But, although it is serious, it is manageable. Neither in terms of total homelessness accepted nor in terms of lettings to the homeless as a percentage of all lettings does Leicester stand out as a particularly difficult city. Indeed, the proportion of homeless people in temporary accommodation has been exceptionally low until very recently. It is not true to say that the Government have failed to help Leicester with its homeless. The city's housing investment programme allocation of £18·3 million was the highest per capita in the east midlands. On the national scale, although the city is only 23rd in terms of population and 27th in terms of need, Leicester's estimated spend for the current year is the 14th highest of those of all the largest housing authorities. In 1989-90 it was ninth highest.

We recognise the vital role of voluntary organisations in the prevention and relief of homelessness. That is why we have again more than doubled—to £4·5 million—the amounts available to those organisations in 1991-92 in grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985. Of this money, £1·6 million goes to the new national co-ordinated homelessness advice service, based on citizens' advice bureaux and involving Shelter and SHAC, to make timely and expert advice more widely available than ever before. The remainder of the money will go to a total of 78 voluntary bodies for specific projects of direct practical help to the single homeless.

Leicester night shelter, for example, received £15,102 in 1990-91 towards the cost of establishing a junior night shelter providing overnight accommodation, meals, advice, therapy and other necessary facilities for homeless people between 16 and 19 in Leicester for whom the existing shelter is not suitable. Funding in the next financial year will be in the region of £25,000 subject to agreement on satisfactory monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

Much play has been made during the debate of the housing that is alleged to have been lost through the right to buy. Of course, that housing is not actually lost at all. For the most part, it is still occupied by the Leicester people who rented it in the first place. When they die or move on, it goes either to their children or to other Leicester people who, in earlier years, would probably have been on the waiting list for rented housing.

The money that is received from the sale of housing is similarly not lost. The Government are ensuring that that money is, as far as possible, used to meet the most urgent need in terms of new capital expenditure on housing, and, by requiring local authorities to repay debt, they are helping to reduce the burden on local authorities. At all events, despite the right-to-buy sales that have taken place, the falls in re-lets have not been as dramatic as some people believe. Between 1984 and 1990 the number of council houses re-let in Leicester has remained stable. It was almost 2,000 last year. With the additional housing association units coming on stream during that period, re-lets for social housing for rent may even have slightly increased.

Leicester city council has had large sums of capital finance to dispense over the past few years. It has had full freedom of choice on how that finance should be allocated. In 1989-90 the council spent more than £48 million. If even £5 million of that had been put into grant aid for housing association building to rent, up to 130 new dwellings could have been provided. Furthermore, the council is owed £4 million in rent arrears—10 per cent. of its total rent roll. That is by far the highest percentage in the whole of the east midlands. It is 21st in the national league. If £4 million could be retrieved, the funds for a further 100 houses might be released. It is most unfair that some of those who are decently housed should deprive the homeless by not paying their rent.

Management of the council stock could also be improved. Void rates have been persistently high over the years. In April last year, the latest year for which figures are available, 2·78 per cent. of its total housing stock was unoccupied. That is almost 3,000 properties—a fact that has been conveniently overlooked in the debate. If that figure could be cut merely to the regional average voids figure, which is just under 2 per cent. of stock, it would make available more than 250 properties—enough to accommodate all the homeless to whom the hon. and learned Gentleman referred. If Leicester could manage its stock as well as the average management performance in the east midlands, many more people could be housed.

In its 1990 housing investment programme return, Leicester failed to estimate how many private sector dwellings were vacant. I expect that the figure must be around 4,000. Any council that was clear-headed about making the best use of available resources and was really determined to meet the needs of its homeless people would by now have been in touch with every owner. It would be encouraging all of them to make use of the new market rent regime that the Government have introduced and make accommodation, either furnished or unfurnished, available for the homeless.

With the consent of the Secretary of State, grants can be paid to private landlords under sections 24 and 25 of the Local Government Act 1988. Those grants take the form of revenue or capital assistance. Where necessary, the council can consent to top up housing benefit payments with grants under section 24 of the Local Government Act 1988 to ensure that owners are fairly recognised. A determined effort could produce hundreds of additional rented properties from that source.

The housing association movement has done a wonderful job in Leicester. Over the past three years it has added 744 dwellings to the stock of houses to let there. In 1990-91, 237 houses were added. Had it wished, Leicester city council could have considered ways of drawing private funding into the rehabilitation of its own rented stock by transferring some of it to the housing association movement. It could thereby have released funds for new build.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister know that housing associations are not handling the demand from homeless people in almost any way and that, of a total accepted statutory homeless of 8,718, the total housed by local authorities in the area was 5,833, and the total housed by housing associations was only 96—that is, 1 per cent.? Those figures come from the east midlands housing corporation for 1989-90.

Mr. Yeo: The figures that the hon. and learned Gentleman quoted are somewhat historic by now, and the housing associations are placing increasing emphasis on housing homeless people. The associations' total programme is building up substantially as the Government are roughly doubling the allocation to the housing association movement through the Housing Corporation—from just over £1 billion in the current year to just over £2 billion in three year's time. The housing associations will be making a rapidly growing contribution towards solving the problems of homelessness in Leicester.

Leicester city council could also consider offering capital payments to some of its existing tenants to encourage them to move into the private rented sector, making way for homeless people with, currently, no alternative but to rent. Another possibility is to make better use of the stock by paying elderly tenants to vacate family housing and move into flats.

Another aspect of overall housing management needs developing. Several authorities have set up property shops, which ensure that each person coming to the council for housing considers all the options open to him, instead of heading automatically into a council house. People are given information about the prices and types of housing available for sale. They are invited to look at shared ownership—something that they may never have considered. Housing associations provide information about their own stock and waiting lists. Most important of all for the longer term, registers of reliable private landlords are built up, and contacts with them maintained, so that this most flexible source of accommodation can make a contribution. In that way, people who would be better suited in another form of tenure do not clog the waiting list unnecessarily, and I commend that course of action to Leicester.

I admire many aspects of Leicester's housing policy. Its renewal strategy over 15 years has done much to consolidate its older private sector stock. More recently, it has begun to work with housing associations. In addition, we worked with it through the estate action programme. But Leicester city council must cease to see itself as a universal provider. Instead, it should consider dispassionately how it can most make use of private sector property and private sector finance, thus adding to the sum of housing to rent. I hope that it will improve those management aspects which have left it with runaway arrears and unnecessary voids. As the economy expands and as Leicester city council comes out of the 1920s, I can foresee much brighter housing prospects for its citizens.

The hon. and learned Gentleman was kind enough to invite me to visit Leicester and to see some of the factors for myself. I am glad to be able to tell him that I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will pay a visit to Leicester later this year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Antares

1. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate for completion of the report of the naval inquiry into the sinking of the fishing boat Antares.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): The naval board of inquiry into the Antares incident was completed in December. Departmental consideration of the board of inquiry report has not yet been completed, but I will make a summary of its findings available to the House in due course.

Mr. Foulkes: Can the Minister give an assurance to the House that the report, and his publication of it, will not shirk from any admission of responsibility for the sinking of the Antares? Will he also confirm that there are no technical reasons why the Clyde reporting scheme, which is proving successful, should not be extended to other fishing areas around our coasts? Since there are no technical reasons why it could not be extended, will he agree now to that extension so as to ensure that another Antares-type tragedy does not take place?

Mr. Hamilton: On the first question, I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that the Royal Navy will not shirk responsibility for the incident. That is not really the purpose of the board of inquiry, which is to find out precisely what happened in terms of the actions of the submarine. The hon. Gentleman should have no fear whatsoever on that account. On the second question, there are no technical reasons that I know of why the reporting system covering the Clyde should not be extended. We want to see how the Clyde scheme works out, and then we shall certainly look into whether it should be extended further.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Clyde fishermen find the new scheme to their advantage and welcome it? Like the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I believe that the scheme should be extended wherever practicable. Fishermen on the west coast of Scotland would appreciate that move by the Ministry of Defence if it were possible.

Mr. Hamilton: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's views on that subject and I am grateful for his remarks. The only point that I would make is on the question of our nuclear deterrent submarines; we do not want it to become clear to the general public when they are transiting out. That is one of the problems with extending the scheme, but we shall consider it.

Mr. Kennedy: Following the Antares disaster, as the Minister said, a scheme has been implemented for the Clyde. He will be aware from contacts that I had earlier today with his private office, which has been very helpful, that there was a near-disaster yesterday off the north of Skye. The incident was similar to what happened to the Antares—a submarine almost destroyed a fishing boat—but mercifully there was no loss of life. Can the Minister give details of that incident and the application of lessons learnt from the Antares disaster in the context of the Minch?

Mr. Hamilton: We should be very careful not to confuse the two issues. What happened on 18 March was not a near-disaster. A Royal Navy submarine, while making a surface transit near to the Raasay range, passed within 80 to 100 yards of the vessel Swyn-Y-Mor. The incident took place in daylight; the submarine had the fishing vessel in sight at all times and took appropriate evasive action as soon as it became apparent that a close pass was likely. Although the submarine tried to raise the fishing vessel on VHF, it did not receive a reply until after the incident had occurred. There was no physical contact between the two vessels or with the trawler's gear.

Tankbusters

2. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons have been learned in the Gulf with regard to the relative merits of tanks and helicopters as tankbusters.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): We are considering the outcome of the campaign and the lessons to be drawn from it, but it is too early to set out definitive conclusions.

Mr. Marlow: Had my hon. Friend been a tank commander in the Gulf, and if he could use his considerable imagination to visualise circumstances whereby, as in any future war, the enemy might have had more overhead cover and concealment, would he have been more fearful of an enemy in Apache helicopters or in Challenger tanks?

Mr. Clark: Both those arms are essential in the pattern of deployment in the future. There are two teams in the Ministry of Defence studying all the lessons. I have little doubt that they will conclude that both helicopters and battle tanks are needed in any future deployment.

Mr. Rogers: Notwithstanding the relative merits of tanks and helicopters, they are not much use unless they are procured. Does the Minister intend to buy new tanks off the shelf, or will he stop dithering and place an order for the new Challenger and the EH101?

Mr. Clark: As for the main battle tank, I share the House's devotion to the subject and I hope that the decision will not be delayed too long. The EH101 has nothing to do with the land battle—as the hon. Gentleman's researcher might have told him, it is a naval weapon.

The Gulf

3. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future deployment of British forces in the Gulf.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): Security arrangements in the Gulf are primarily for the states of the region. We are ready to play our part if asked, but we do not envisage the permanent stationing of British ground forces in the area.

Mr. Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the achievement of our armed services in the Gulf during the past seven months will rank among the greatest campaigns in the history of the British armed forces? Does he also agree that the manner in which the campaign was planned and executed can be judged by the low level of casualties sustained by the British forces? Now that our service men are returning from the Gulf, will he give an assessment of the dangers of a delay of that return which may arise from the chaos and bloodshed now occurring in Iraq?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his tribute to what was a remarkable team effort by all the armed forces and by those who supported them in industry and in the country as a whole. We are now moving very quickly towards the withdrawal of our forces. They are coming home at the rate of about 1,000 a day and they are certainly receiving a very warm welcome. We intend to proceed with the withdrawal, subject to satisfactory progress in terms of the ceasefire.

Mr. Alfred Morris: In what circumstances does the Minister envisage that hostilities against Iraq could be resumed?

Mr. King: The suspension of hostilities has occurred only recently. Clearly, we are watching developments very carefully. We want to see peace and security in the area —that was part of our objective in going there. At the moment, we do not see any circumstances in which we should become involved again.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the coming together in Damascus of eight Arab members of the coalition to produce defence plans for the Gulf gets the defence of the region off to a good start, while recognising the need for Britain to have maritime and air forces there? Can my right hon. Friend tell us anything about the future stockpiling of heavy equipment?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the success of the Damascus meeting and of the communiqué which recognised the role that could be played by Egyptian and Syrian forces as the nucleus for security in the area. We have certainly made clear our willingness to play our part and we are in close discussion with our allies and friends in the area to consider the most helpful way to do that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal to the House to listen to Defence questions as they are very important.

Nuclear Submarines

4. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what exchanges of information have taken place with the United States of America Government about systems for, and experience in, decommissioning of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is a regular exchange of information between the United States and United Kingdom Governments under the 1958 mutual defence agreement and we are generally aware of each other's views.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that an important principle of parliamentary government is that Ministers do not mislead the House? Can he therefore explain how Ministers continue to tell us confidently the cost of the Trident programme when it appears that neither Britain nor the United States knows what the cost of decommissioning a nuclear submarine would be? As they do not know how to do it, how can Ministers tell us how much it costs?

Mr. Clark: Decommissioning is not included in the costs of acquisition. The hon. Gentleman may be confusing decommissioning with disposal. Decommissioning is a recognised procedure which involves removing the fuel and various ancillary items to make the vessel relatively safe so that it can be stored afloat until its fate is decided.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my hon. Friend tell the House what exchanges took place between the United Kingdom and United States Governments about the British "Options for Change" exercise whereby the number of Royal Navy nuclear attack submarines is to be substantially reduced, what the United States advised about the reduction of our capability in that area and whether advice was sought from the United States on the disposal of hulls?

Mr. Clark: Advice from the United States was not sought on the disposal of hulls. We are perfectly capable of making decisions independently. Reductions in future deployment under the "Options for Change" scheme are a matter for consultation with all our NATO allies, including the United States.

Mr. Boyes: Is not it incredible that, after all this time, the Government still cannot come up with a solution acceptable to the British people for the decommissioning of nuclear submarines? Such a solution clearly excludes dumping at sea, which is the worst possible option. It is clear that there has been no new thinking from the Government, although a range of options have been researched by the Opposition. All that we get is a faltering Minister in a vacillating Government led by a tired and dithering Prime Minister.

Mr. Clark: Who is the hon. Gentleman to claim to speak for the British people? I am wholly unaware of any concern being expressed to me by any member of the British public about the disposal of nuclear submarines. Neither I nor my Department has had a single letter about that in the past year.

The Gulf

5. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further progress has been made in his Department's review of Britain's defence commitments; and what lessons have been learned as a result of the Gulf war.

Mr. Tom King: We believe that there is scope for changing our defence arrangements following the collapse of the Warsaw pact and the unification of Germany. Some initial decisions have already been announced, but the final size and shape of our armed forces will need to take account of our consultations with NATO and our allies, the security position in Europe and with the Soviet Union, and progress on arms control. We shall also need to take account of the lessons learnt in the Gulf.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important lesson of the Gulf war is that the United Kingdom must hold unto itself the decision on when to commit its armed forces? Will he further agree that if we had been part of a common defence arrangement in Europe we would probably not have been able to make a contribution to collective security?

Mr. King: I certainly believe, as the lessons of the Gulf have shown, in the importance of having allies with whom we can work closely, and in the benefits of a coalition in such circumstances. I also strongly support the need for us to have the power to act and, first, to be able to take the decision to act. The other important aspect, which I know that my hon. Friend will support, is to have the power to act and to have forces able to act and to make such a valuable contribution.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Secretary of State agree that the commitment of the United Kingdom must depend on the nature of the threat that it may have to meet? In that regard, does he share my concern that the Soviet Union launched more submarines last year than in the previous year and there are reports that it has now placed 10,000 tanks east of the Ural mountains, apparently to frustrate the effects of the conventional arms reduction treaty? Will due account be taken of those factors in assessing the commitments of the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have noticed that that point is precisely one of the aspects with which I dealt in relation to the progress of arms control. One of our concerns is the number of Soviet tanks transferred from the Soviet army to the Soviet navy, putting them outside the remit of present arms control and leading to a situation in which, as is well known, the Soviet navy now has more tanks than the British Army. We have raised those issues. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised them very directly on his recent visit to Moscow. That is precisely why we have not ratified the conventional forces reduction in Europe treaty.

Mr. Onslow: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, whatever reviews take place, his Department will not lose sight of the importance of our reserve forces and especially of the Territorial Army?

Mr. King: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend. I refer the House to my statement last July, in which I said:

"The volunteer reserves continue to play a key role, and we wish to consider the appropriate numbers for the future, having regard to our needs and realistic levels of recruitment and retention."—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1990; Vol. 177 c. 472.]

The whole House recognises the valuable role that the reserves and the volunteer reserves have played as recently as in the Gulf campaign. That underlines the importance of the role that they can play.

Mr. O'Neill: What other out-of-area threats do the Government envisage having to meet? How relevant would armoured divisions be in such circumstances? Following the destruction of the fourth largest army in the world—the Iraqi army—few countries, surely, could pose a threat equal to that posed by Iraq in the recent past.

Mr. King: It is incredible that the hon. Gentleman—the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—should conclude that we shall not be forced to face any further armoured threat in the world. The lesson to be drawn from the Gulf and, indeed, from the very fact of the difference between that threat and the threat that we faced in the Falklands, is that we must be prepared for the unexpected and able to make our contribution, whatever shape the threat may take.

Ministry Houses

6. **Sir David Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the arrangements for temporarily leasing empty MOD houses to local authorities to assist in their duty to provide accommodation for the homeless; how many houses on the MOD estate at Barton Stacey have been empty for more than six months; and what percentage of the estate this represents.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): I am generally satisfied that the arrangements for temporarily leasing empty MOD houses to local authorities are adequate. We currently have more than 600 properties on lease throughout the United Kingdom, and we have recently offered a further 700 properties for leasing to 13 separate authorities, including Test Valley borough council in my hon. Friend's constituency. Sixteen houses on the MOD estates at Barton Stacey have been empty for more than six months, representing 12 per cent. of the MOD estate. Of those 16 properties, 11 are in the process of being sold.

Sir David Mitchell: I do not share my hon. Friend's satisfaction with the information that he has given. On 4 February, 20 per cent of the houses on the MOD estate were vacant, while the borough council's figure was 1 per cent. Will my hon. Friend overhaul the whole system of management, which is at present inadequate?

Mr. Carlisle: Where houses are not needed, we sell the surplus; however, we require a management margin of 9 per cent. As my hon. Friend knows, we cannot keep a waiting list for Army families, who move around every two months, whereas local authorities can build up substantial waiting lists.

The Gulf

7. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the timetable for withdrawal of British troops from the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: British forces are now being progressively withdrawn from the Gulf. In the next two weeks, further ships, 7th Armoured Brigade Group and the bulk of the RAF combat aircraft will return. The precise timing of the return of other units will depend on progress on the ceasefire and other factors.

Mr. Nellist: In an earlier answer, the Secretary of State told us that troops were returning at a rate of about 1,000 per day, so their return should be complete by about the end of April. What is the Government's view of the insurrection now taking place in Iraq, especially in the north and the south-west? Is it the same as the view of the United States Government which, according to a report in *The Guardian* last week, seems to boil down to "Better the devil you know than a weak coalition or a new strong man", or do the Government welcome the fact that the people of Iraq are dealing with their own problems and trying to fight for democracy?

Mr. King: The government of Iraq, and the choice of who should govern, are matters for the people of Iraq.

Mr. Bellingham: As some of the forces are already returning from Iraq, will my right hon. Friend find time today to pay a further tribute to the three squadrons from RAF Marham in west Norfolk who played a superb role in the conflict? Will he also reflect on the fact that if the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) had had his way there would have been no British forces in the Gulf to withdraw?

Mr. King: I note that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) has changed the thrust of his questions. My hon. Friend is right—the liberation of Kuwait would not have been achieved without the determination of the Government and the coalition to ensure that in the final analysis, if peaceful means and diplomacy could not prevail, we were prepared to use force. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute not only to RAF Marham, whose forces and units made an outstanding contribution, but to all our forces and to the coalition forces for the part that they played in using the force that was necessary.

Dr. Reid: Last Saturday in Devon the Secretary of State said that the priority was to get the troops home and give them the welcome and thanks that they deserved. Does he accept that many of the young men and women returning home face an uncertain and insecure future because of possible cuts in armed services numbers as a result of "Options for Change"? Does he agree that the thanks and welcome that they deserve is a Government guarantee that adequate retraining will be provided for those who may face re-entry into civilian life? Does the Secretary of State accept that the existing 28 days pre-release training is woefully inadequate and is it not time that he gave the armed services a real vote of confidence by announcing plans to augment the already meagre measures for retraining?

Mr. King: I understand entirely the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to give reassurance and confidence to our armed forces after the part that they have played. I am interested that the hon. Gentleman chooses to ask that question from the Opposition Front Bench. Whatever changes we may think modest and possible within the changed security environment are as nothing compared with the changes that the Opposition would impose if their defence cuts were ever implemented.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although it is a high priority to bring as many of our service men as possible home as quickly as we can from the Gulf, where they have done such a splendid job, the situation in the Gulf is likely to remain unstable for a very long time, even if the shooting stops, because of the many different, powerful and, in many cases, unpleasant groups there, so the Government will have to consider maintaining a presence in the Gulf for a very long time?

Mr. King: Whatever the longer-term future may hold, the immediate present is very uncertain. We are monitoring the situation and making it clear that the completion of our withdrawal will depend on a satisfactory agreement being reached on a formal ceasefire. We have not yet achieved all our objectives, but in the longer term we shall keep the issue to which my hon. Friend referred under review. We do not envisage having ground forces in the area, but I have already said that we shall have a naval presence there and that we shall wish to keep in very close defence contact with our friends and allies in the area.

Service Men (Personal Lives)

8. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aspects of the personal life of service men are taken into account in matters of recruitment and dismissal from employment in Her Majesty's forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The armed forces seek recruits whose personal qualities are such that they will ensure that the high standards of our professional, volunteer services are maintained. Applicants must demonstrate that they are able to integrate within the services and cope with the rigours of service life. Service personnel who commit offences against the services discipline Acts, or who are judged unsuitable for service life, may be dismissed or discharged.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Do the Minister and his colleagues remember the case of Miss X in my constituency who was dismissed for her alleged sexual preferences? In so far as Miss X has repeatedly denied those allegations—as, indeed, has her boy friend—can a full inquiry be held into what actually happened, as it seems clear to me that a grave injustice has been done?

Mr. Hamilton: I think that the best thing that the hon. Gentleman can do is to write to me about the case, as I have no intimate knowledge of it. If he does so, we shall certainly look into it.

Mr. Mans: In relation to recruitment and retention in the services, will my hon. Friend comment on the sending of soldiers under the age of 18 into combat zones?

Mr. Hamilton: It has always been the practice of the armed forces to send people who are fully trained into combat. It is quite possible for people under the age of 18 to be fully trained. We should not sent them into combat unless they were.'

The Gulf

10. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will enumerate the financial costs of deployment of British armed forces in the Gulf up to the end of the Gulf war.

Mr. Tom King: As so far assessed, the additional costs of the Gulf conflict are about £1·75 billion. The eventual costs will be significantly higher—possibly up to £3 billion, spread over several years. I am discussing the provision for those additional costs which fall in 1991-92 with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Implications for defence spending from 1992-93 will be considered in the normal way later this year.

Mr. Fields: The figures show the Secretary of State's obvious influence in Cabinet when arguing for such sums of money to remove the obscenity of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. Will he now use that same influence to remove from British society the obscenities of homelessness, poverty and hospital waiting lists and to enable pensioners and others on income support not to have to pay the poll tax—or are those simply areas of collateral damage and thus insignificant?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, at least for the first part of his question. It was the first time that I have heard him pay tribute to the work of our forces or recognise the need for us to take the action that we did for the liberation of Kuwait. The other issues obviously go a little wide of the question.

Mr. Tim Smith: What progress has my right hon. Friend made in obtaining contributions from overseas towards the cost of the war?

Mr. King: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary has been the most active in that area. We have received significant contributions, amounting to in excess of £1·25 billion, and we hope for further contributions from our allies who very much appreciate our contribution to the liberation of Kuwait and the costs involved.

Mr. Tony Banks: We could have saved even more money by not fighting the war at all. One of the best ways of guaranteeing that we do not get into such wars is to ensure that unpleasant people such as Saddam Hussein are not given arms by western nations. For future reference, will the Secretary of State tell us what support he is giving to President Bush, who said that there will be a moratorium on arms exports to the middle east? Will he give an assurance in the House that we shall not, under any circumstances, authorise any arms exports to anyone in the middle east from now on?

Mr. King: That is a particularly silly supplementary question—but well above the hon. Gentleman's usual standard. He knows perfectly well—he has been told this on a number of occasions—that we have strict licensing requirements for the export of arms. He knows perfectly well that we have not sold arms to Iraq for a number of years, for precisely the reason that he has in mind. He also knows perfectly well that some of the arms that we have sold, especially to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, helped in the campaign to liberate Kuwait.

Relocation Projects

11. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many man hours have so far been spent by Ministry of Defence officials in evaluating relocation projects within his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since 1979 my Department has evaluated, or is evaluating, 25 separate relocation projects involving nearly 25,000 posts. Those studies have involved many areas of the Department, although most of the detailed work is done at local level. No central record is kept of the man hours involved in this work.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply and especially for the details of the number of relocation exercises that have been considered in the past 10 years. Apart from being considered, how many of those projects have reached fruition and how many people have been relocated?

Mr. Carlisle: About 2,500 people have already moved and we are looking at a number of other projects. A further 6,500 people are expected to move by 1995 and nearly 2,000 are under review for movement thereafter.

Mr. Frank Cook: How long will it take to give the constituents of Stockton a clear idea about the relocation of the directorate general of the defence quality assurance unit from Woolwich to Stockton?

Mr. Carlisle: I am delighted to see the hon. Gentleman in his place again in good health. I am fully aware of his interest in Stockton, as well as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), both of whom brought an all-party delegation to see me. I am aware of the claims of the north-east to be the new home of the quality assurance organisation, but I shall not make any decision until our studies are complete, which I expect to be soon. We have a public duty to ensure that every relocation is truly cost effective.

The Gulf

12. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons his Department has learnt from the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are considering the outcome of the campaign and the conclusions to be drawn from it, but it is too early to say how the results of the work might be made public.

Mr. Adley: Having listened to the exchanges of the past half hour, my hon. Friend will understand why I have decided to change my supplementary question somewhat. Does he agree that the views expressed by not only Labour Back-Benchers but Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen make it clear that, if by any awful mischance, Britain ever found itself dependent on Ministers in a Labour Government for the defence of the realm, it would be wise at least to order a large supply of white flags?

Mr. Hamilton: There is no doubt whatever that if, by some misfortune, the Labour party won the next election, our defence capability would be reduced drastically. In the light of recent experience, that would be a great mistake.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that whatever lessons are to be learnt from the Gulf, they will not alter

the main priority of our defence budget, which is to maintain the defence of these islands? In that context, will he reaffirm the Government's commitment to the important role that the European fighter aircraft will play as a defensive conventional war plane? Will he take every opportunity in the years ahead to urge the continued support of the three other European partners in the project?

Mr. Hamilton: We shall continue to urge our European partners to support the EFA. Our commitment to it is total. There can be no question about that. Not only conventional weapons have an important role; nuclear weapons have also done much to defend Europe in the past. They should continue to do so and Britain should continue to have its own independent deterrent. I am sad that so many people on the Opposition Benches believe that we should negotiate it away.

"Options for Change"

13. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications for south Dorset of the "Options for Change" review.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are examining the scope for rationalising a wide range of defence support activities. No decisions affecting south Dorset have yet been taken.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the armed forces are masters of the diversionary tactic? Does he agree that when Ministers ask for reductions, they are offered relocations and collocations? Will he consider all the jobs in south Dorset and realise that he is being conned? If he wants reductions, he should examine the parts of the armed forces where reductions are needed rather than the parts that he has already decided that he intends to keep. Is he aware that the cost of moving some parts to other areas will be enormous?

Mr. Hamilton: We are looking at a wide range of defence real estate across the country. It is true that in south Dorset there are significant amounts of defence estate. We must consider that in common with everything else. I repeat that no decisions have yet been taken. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) come into the Chamber so that we can perhaps get on with Question Time?

Mr. O'Neill: When considering the implications for south Dorset, will the Minister of State also remember that there are other naval bases as well as that at Portland, which seems to be the subject of consideration under the "Options for Change" process? Does he agree that it is desirable to conduct the process openly, rather than its being the subject of rumours and leaks which cause unnecessary anxiety to the communities involved? Will he include Rosyth with Portland when he says that no decisions have been taken and no conclusions reached on closures?

Mr. Hamilton: That is why, when people came to see me about Rosyth, I assured them that we were considering all the naval bases and naval support across the board. That confirms what I have been saying to people who are worried about Rosyth. There is no singling out of Rosyth. We are considering naval support across the board. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to listen to the last few minutes of Defence Questions.

The Gulf

14. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current military situation in the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: Following the defeat of the Iraqi army in Kuwait, the coalition suspended offensive combat operations, subject to clearly laid down conditions. These included the immediate return of our prisoners of war and of the remains of those who lost their lives. In advance of any agreement on a final ceasefire, coalition forces have been clearing the battlefield; naval forces have been continuing their mine-clearing operations; and air forces have been maintaining defensive air patrols. At the same time, we have begun the phased withdrawal of some of our forces.

Mr. Wilshire: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Saddam Hussein's barbaric use of force against his own people proves that he still cannot be trusted? In the circumstances, does he also agree that there can be no lasting peace in the middle east until the coalition forces have satisfied themselves that there are no chemical or biological weapons left in Iraq?

Mr. King: I certainly accept that we cannot trust Saddam Hussein. We have made that very clear and by the use of force we have now liberated Kuwait. I assure my hon. Friend that the importance of eliminating Saddam Hussein's nuclear, biological and chemical capability is something to which we attach the greatest importance.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Did the Secretary of State see the excellent but disturbing report by Charles Wheeler on "Newsnight" last night? Does he agree that the oppression of Palestinians in Kuwait is totally unacceptable? Does he agree that any oppression in Kuwait is completely unacceptable and that that was not the reason for the presence of British troops in the Gulf?

Mr. King: In response to an earlier question, I paid tribute to the role of our reservists in the Gulf and their ready willingness to play their part in that important conflict. I should like to welcome back my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and thank him for the contribution that he made, like many of his colleagues, who so gladly responded to the call for reservists.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's question, when I was in Kuwait I made the strongest representations to the Kuwaiti Government about the need to ensure justice and fairness for all the people in the area. I said that we went to liberate Kuwait, to free it from intolerance and cruelty, and that we do not want intolerance and cruelty perpetuated there in any way.

USAF Fairford

15. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the future use of USAF Fairford.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The temporary deployment of United States B52 aircraft to RAF Fairford in support of Operation Desert Storm has now ended. The station remains available to the United States air force as a standby facility. In the short term, United States tanker and transport aircraft may continue to use RAF Fairford in support of the withdrawal of United States forces from the Gulf region.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend will be well aware of the excellent contribution made by USAF Fairford to the allied effort in the Gulf. He may also be aware that this has generated considerable uncertainty in the vicinity of the base. Will he undertake to discuss with our allies in the United States the future of the base so as to be able to make a clear statement of intent for the longer-term future?

Mr. Hamilton: We are in discussions with the United States air force about this, but current plans are that it should continue as a standby base and be used for exercises. I do not think that it will go beyond that.

Contracts

16. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of contracts awarded by the Ministry of Defence go to British-owned companies.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence does not maintain contract statistics on the basis of the ownership of companies but by the location where the majority of the work is to be undertaken. Taking into account our share of international collaborative programmes, around 90 per cent. of the defence equipment budget is spent with companies in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jones: Should not we spend 100 per cent. of our money in this country, bearing in mind the fact that we are in a recession created by the effect of eleven and a half years of Tory misrule on the economy and the fact that we have the biggest-ever balance of payments deficit? Will he make efforts to do so in the future?

Mr. Clark: I reject that argument. The figure of 90 per cent. represents an excellent tribute to the competitiveness of British industry. My Department searches constantly for the best value for money in weapons procurement. That is our obligation to the hon. Gentleman's constituents who pay their taxes and to the whole of the public. We look for value for money by objective criteria and, as I say, it testifies to the competitiveness of British industry that it managed to reach the 90 per cent. total.

Mr. Batiste: Does my right hon. Friend agree that British defence companies need clearly defined time scales against which to commit their expenditure? In that context, when will he be in a position to announce the decision for the replacement of the Chieftain tank, bearing in mind the outstanding performance of the Challenger tank in the Gulf war?

Mr. Clark: It is perfectly true that not only did the Challenger tank perform extremely well, but the whole support operation provided by the manufacturers was of the highest quality. I hope that a decision on the replacement of the Chieftain will not be delayed too long.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening, I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Trotter: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that when he visited the Gulf he heard the Challenger 1 tank had performed very well and that the Vickers work force gave stalwart support to the Army before and during the conflict? Does he agree that the new Challenger 2 is designed specifically for the British Army's requirements and that it meets them? Will those factors be given due recognition and is he aware of the need for an early order if Vickers is to maintain its manufacturing capability and win export orders for this world-beater?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I confirm what my hon. Friend says. The performance of the Challenger 1 tank in the Gulf was quite outstanding. Before we reach a decision on the replacement—on a Challenger 2 tank—we must analyse the lessons that we learnt in the Gulf. I hope that that will soon be done and then we shall move speedily to a decision.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall saying recently:

> "Michael's claim of taking education from the poll tax and putting it into central education has . . . the disadvantage that it has to be paid for elsewhere, either in more borrowing, more taxation, or pre-empting money that would otherwise go to the health service"?

Is that still the Prime Minister's view?

The Prime Minister: Government services have to be paid for, from whatever pocket they may come, and that is still the case.

Mr. Kinnock: I know all about that—*[Interruption.]* —but from the way the Government are behaving, one wonders whether they know all about that, too. Will the Prime Minister now answer my question? Does he still take the view that he enunciated a short time ago, or does he now agree with Michael? If he does not, is he still dithering in between?

The Prime Minister: I am glad to hear the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he knows that local government services have to be paid for. I just wish that he would tell some of his hon. Friends that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The right hon. Gentleman will have all his answers by the end of this week.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend accept that my appalling voting record over the past few months is no reflection on my wholehearted support for him and the Government?

On a more serious note, does my right hon. Friend agree that the united voice that went out from the House in support of our troops on the ground in the Gulf was of

immeasurable help to them and that that, combined with the unsurpassed military leadership under which we served, led to the magnificent military outcome?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I think that I echo the views of the whole House in saying that in recent weeks my hon. Friend has been in the right place. We welcome him back to the House—to the place which is his by right.

Mr. Ashdown: If the Prime Minister will not recall his own words, will he recall the words of his predecessor, who, speaking in the House on 15 November for a Government in which he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that transferring education expenditure to central Government would result in huge tax increases and in a reduction in local services? Does the right hon. Gentleman still agree with his right hon. Friend?

The Prime Minister: There are many things about which I am in wholehearted agreement with my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Those things include clear opposition to proportional representation and a reluctance to do deals with the right hon. Gentleman.

Q2. **Mr. Simon Burns:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burns: Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 12,000 of my constituents travel by British Rail from Chelmsford to Liverpool Street every day? Does he accept that although the service has improved somewhat in the past few years, it still leaves a great deal to be desired? Can he reassure my constituents that the current record levels of investment in British Rail will continue, so that services may be improved further?

The Prime Minister: I sympathise with my hon. Friend. I know that the views of his constituents are shared by my constituents and by the constituents of many other hon. Members. The Government's investment priority is to ensure that all routes are brought up to the high standard that commuters have a right to expect. That is, and has been, our policy.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to welcome the release of the six innocent men who were convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings? Does he agree that if confidence in our judicial system is to be restored it will be necessary for someone above the rank of police sergeant to take responsibility for the recent series of disasters?

The Prime Minister: No one in the House either now or at any time in the past, would have wished to see innocent men gaoled. As the convictions were insecure, it is entirely right that the gentlemen to whom the hon. Member referred have now been released. The whole House will be pleased about that. Clearly, we need to look at procedures. The royal commission on the criminal justice system will report speedily and comprehensively.

Q3. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholson: My right hon. Friend will recall personal tax rates of up to 98 per cent., a standard rate of 35 per cent. and weird taxes such as selective employment tax. However deep our party's hostility to those taxes might have been, no one doubted that they had to be collected and that they had to be paid. Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Taunton, where the community charge has been collected efficiently, are of the opinion that until the House changes tax measures, public authorities will have a duty to collect taxes and individuals, including hon. Members, will have a duty to pay them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Everyone has a duty to uphold the law as passed by the House. That is particularly true of hon. Members. Those who seek to make the law should never break the law.

Q4. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister agree that an important principle of British public life is that when the Ministers or other senior public figures make grave errors of judgment they resign? In doing so, they restore confidence in their office and they salvage a little of their reputation. Will the Prime Minister draw that principle to the attention of Lord Chief Justice Lane?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly not draw that to the attention of Lord Chief Justice Lane. I believe that he applied the facts of the case as he saw them; hindsight knowledge is never an attractive thing.

Q5. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Field: Recognising the long hours worked during the Gulf war by my right hon. Friend and the distinguished service—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This takes up a lot of time.

Mr. Field: —and the distinguished service given by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), may I invite them both to partake of the invigorating political air of the Isle of Wight during the Easter recess, where they will observe that the Conservative borough councils of South Wight and Medina have transferred all their housing stock to housing associations, making the Isle of Wight a unique county?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a tempting offer. If I may deal with the underlying concern of his point, to paraphrase Mr. Samuel Clemens, reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and I would welcome my hon. Friend's invitation.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Prime Minister confirm that he told his Back Benchers yesterday that the Achilles heel of the poll tax was its uncollectability? Will he therefore acknowledge that the campaign of resistance to the tax has

been a key factor in sinking his predecessor's flagship? When the Government make their statement on Thursday, will it contain any form of apology to the people of Scotland for the additional year under which we have suffered from this iniquitous tax?

The Prime Minister: I will confirm no such thing and if the hon. Gentleman played any part in any campaign of disobedience, he has no right to be in the House.

Q6. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my right hon. Friend accept that London commuters generally will welcome the increased emphasis that the Government are putting on the quality of service in rail transport? As the Stansted airport rail link starts, from today, to place heavier burdens on the infrastructure of the West Anglia line, can commuters there hope that their interests will not be subordinated to the interests of airline travellers?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, improvement in quality is very much the objective of the Government's policies and of British Rail. He will know that modern rolling stock has been provided for the Stansted express and is intended to provide both fast and frequent services to the newly expanded airport. I shall draw my hon. Friend's concerns about normal commuter services on the West Anglia line to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Q8. **Mr. Lofthouse** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Prime Minister tell us why he recently said that the poll tax would prove to be enduring and would be a vast improvement on the rates? As he appears rapidly to have changed his mind, does he expect the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) to change hers, too?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will find the answers to all those questions on Thursday.

Q9. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bowis: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read the editorials pointing out that if Wandsworth had received the same amount of Government grant as neighbouring Lambeth, it could have put a cheque in the post to every charge payer? Does he agree that the lesson to be drawn from that is that whatever system of local government finance we have, the only one worth voting for is one run by Conservative councils?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a valid point——

Mr. Meale: No, he does not.

The Prime Minister: Yes, he does. Lambeth received almost £300 a head more in external grant than Wandsworth, yet most Wandsworth residents seem to think that they get better services than do the residents of neighbouring Lambeth. The reason is clear: Lambeth is a Labour council and that is why the service is so expensive and so rotten.

Mr. Clelland: Although I fully appreciate the need to review defence procurement policy following the Gulf conflict, does the Prime Minister agree that that would affect only the size of the order for main battle tanks, not necessarily the manufacturer which will provide them? Will he therefore have a word with the Secretary of State for Defence with a view to making an early announcement that the order will go to a British manufacturer, Vickers Defence Systems?

The Prime Minister: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and we shall seek to learn all the lessons possible from the Gulf conflict. As soon as it is concluded, we shall endeavour to reach an early decision. I hope that there will be no unnecessary delay.

Mr. Nelson: Will my right hon. Friend find time to reaffirm the Government's strong commitment to defence? Does he agree that one reason why our armed forces did the job in the Gulf was that, over the past 10 years, the Conservative Government have voted and spent the necessary money for the right equipment and training, while the Opposition parties have constantly called for disarmament and defence cuts?

The Prime Minister: I happily reaffirm that. Defence remains a matter of intense importance to this side of the House and, in case there is any doubt, I should make it clear that that includes nuclear defence.

WAYS AND MEANS

Budget Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that, at the end of the Chancellor's speech, copies of the Budget resolutions will be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): Like, I suspect, most Chancellors, I have found the preparation of this, my first Budget, very exciting. As usual, I have read a huge amount of speculation in the press over the past few weeks about the contents of the Budget. I have also learnt a number of interesting things. For example, I was surprised to read last Wednesday that I am almost as well known as Desert Orchid—and I have not yet run in the Gold Cup.

Actually, Desert Orchid and I have much in common: we are both greys; vast sums of money ride on our performance; the Opposition hope we will fall at the first fence; and we are both carrying too much weight. The crucial difference is that Chancellors are never favourites.

I have had the advantage of serving at the Treasury under two Chancellors: my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who last year delivered a notable Budget for savers, and before that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). If I may make a personal observation, working for my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby was always stimulating and exciting, and I am extremely grateful for his encouragement over the years. My admiration and respect for him remain undimmed. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that this is an exciting day in the House, but perhaps we should try to behave like the mother of all Parliaments.

Mr. Lamont: I intend to carry forward my predecessor's work. My central economic aim is to bring inflation down and keep it down. Beyond that, my objective is to encourage enterprise by creating a broadly based tax system that allows markets to do their job with the minimum of distortion and Government interference.

Although there is no scope this year for an overall reduction in taxes, my Budget today will include measures to help business through the recession in the short term and to encourage it to invest for the longer term. It will provide assistance for families. It will also further the process of tax reform and make some radical changes in the tax system.

As usual, I shall begin with a review of the economic situation and prospects. I shall then deal with monetary policy and public finances. Finally, I shall present my tax proposals.

The "Financial Statement and Budget Report", together with a number of press releases filling out the details of my proposals, will be available from the Vote Office as soon as I have sat down.

ECONOMIC SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

I refer first to international developments. The past year has brought recession to a number of major industrial countries including the United States, Canada and Australia. Growth in Germany has been sustained by reunification; but elsewhere in Europe, activity has slowed and industrial production has fallen in recent months in Spain, Italy and France. In five of the seven leading industrial nations, industrial output is now lower than it was a year ago.

The basic cause is the same everywhere: very rapid growth in the industrialised world during the 1980s led to the re-emergence of inflationary pressures. A period of slower growth was needed to stop inflation taking hold again.

In the autumn, the slowdown was magnified by the Gulf crisis. Business and consumer confidence were badly dented, first, by the uncertainties and the sharp rise in oil prices that followed the invasion of Kuwait, and then the prospect of war. Travel and tourism were especially hard-hit.

Mercifully, the war was brief and the outcome successful. Confidence is recovering and that will strengthen the economic upturn when the time comes; and the fall in oil prices has already improved the outlook for inflation.

So although 1991 as a whole will show little growth in the seven major economies—a ½ per cent. increase in industrial production compared to 5¾ per cent. in 1988—the slowdown is unlikely to last long. Inflation is already moderating in those countries that are in recession, and activity should start to recover later this year in north America, helped by continued expansion in Germany and Japan.

In the United Kingdom, the recession came after eight years of growth averaging 3 per cent. a year. This sustained growth bred confidence and that in turn led to a quite unprecedented rise in borrowing. Personal borrowing increased by nearly 40 per cent. in 1988 alone, to reach £54 billion—and a new record for the ratio of debt to income. This produced a sharp drop in the personal saving ratio, which coincided with a massive boom in investment by companies.

In itself, the rise of investment—nearly 80 per cent. between 1981 and 1989—was welcome, but the economy could not go on expanding at that rate. Some firms and individuals became over-extended and we saw a deterioration in the current account and a wholly unwelcome rise in inflation.

It is easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to say that policy should have been tighter; and, once the problem became clear, policy was indeed tightened. We ran a large budget surplus. Interest rates were raised, and they had to stay high until there were unmistakable signs that excess demand pressure had been removed. That took longer than we—or outside commentators—expected, and the delay meant that the adjustment, when it came, was all the sharper.

Since the middle of last year, individuals and companies have been taking steps to reduce their borrowing. Consumer spending has fallen back, and the saving ratio has risen sharply to 10·8 per cent. Firms have found it hard going. Profits have weakened, caught in the pincer of low turnover and rising costs, and the burden of debt taken on in the late 1980s has proved a heavy one.

It is not surprising, therefore, that business investment has fallen from the heights of 1989 and early 1990. Stocks are now being reduced, and companies are making strenuous efforts to cut costs. That has led to a sharp increase in unemployment during recent months, although there are welcome signs that firms are continuing to invest in skills and training. I expect output in 1991 as a whole to be about 2 per cent. less than in 1990. Much of that fall, of course, has already happened. It is largely behind us and, as I shall be explaining in a moment, the resumption of growth should not be long delayed.

The process of retrenchment has been painful, as it always is, but it has been necessary and is now producing results. The current account deficit has improved sharply —especially the balance on manufactures—even though world trade has been weak. Imports have fallen, while exports in some sectors, notably cars, have continued to grow strongly—testimony to the fact that industry is immeasurably better placed today than it was 10 years ago.

No one can doubt that inflation is on the way down. There has already been a fall of 2 percentage points since the peak last October, and there is widespread agreement that the fall in inflation will continue through 1991 and into 1992.

The prospects are now better than they appeared at the time of the autumn statement. The February survey by the Confederation of British Industry showed that the balance of firms expecting to increase prices was at its lowest level ever. The forecast published today, taking account of the effect of the Budget measures, is for inflation to fall to an average of 4 per cent. in the last quarter of this year and below 4 per cent. in the first half of 1992. The prospect, therefore, is that we will narrow the inflation gap with Europe remarkably quickly.

In the mid-1980s, we did get inflation briefly below 4 per cent., and we saw the advantages that followed. We are about to do so again, and again we will reap the benefits. Lower inflation, and the lower interest rates that go with it, will be a powerful force for recovery.

One of the lessons that I have learnt from years of grappling with economic statistics is that it is difficult to be certain about the past, let alone about the future. It is always especially difficult to predict the timing of turning points in the economy. However, there are good reasons to expect that the recovery will begin around the middle of this year, although initially it may be slow.

As we found 10 years ago, confidence revives as inflation comes down. This time, the ending of the Gulf war will give the revival an added boost. Just as falling consumer spending contributed to the onset of recession, so returning consumer confidence is likely to lead the recovery. At the same time, the reduction of stocks is likely to slow and the United Kingdom will benefit from the upturn in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

As a result, I expect output to stabilise in the next few months and then to increase by about 2 per cent. between the first half of this year and the first half of 1992. Looking further ahead, our projections show growth of about 3 per cent. a year as the economy recovers further.

The easing of demand pressures has already brought a marked improvement in our current account. As the House will have noticed, there can be lags not just between policies and their effects, but between the effects in the real world and their appearance in the official statistics. As a result of the recent revisions of the figures for invisible imports and exports, the current account deficit for last year is now estimated at under £13 billion, £2 billion less than forecast at the time of last year's Budget. This year, I expect the deficit to be halved to £6 billion, about 1 per cent. of national income.

Regrettably, unemployment is likely to go on rising for a while yet, even after the recovery has started. How far and how fast it rises will depend, in part, on the speed with which pay settlements come down—and come down they must, eventually, to the levels prevailing in other ERM countries. There is no escape route through devaluation, and firms know this.

Fortunately, a sharp fall in inflation is in prospect, and the reforms that we have introduced over the past decade have led to more pay flexibility. Some firms have already deferred pay settlements or agreed pay pauses. The more firms that follow their lead, the sooner we can reverse the trend in unemployment, and start creating jobs again.

To sum up, the prospect for the year ahead is for an end to the recession, growth of about 2 per cent. in the 12 months to the first half of 1992, and inflation below 4 per cent. This does not seem to me an unpromising outlook.

For the longer term, there is every reason to be optimistic about the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Recessions are always painful, but they are an inescapable feature of market economies—and they are temporary. Longer-term growth depends on having a thriving competitive private sector. That we now have, thanks to the reforms of the past 10 years.

If I may confess it, I do not believe in miracles, but I do believe that the right policies, courageously and consistently applied year by year, can produce a transformation in an economy, and that is what happened in the 1980s.

So now we can build on real achievements: a record number of new businesses, faster growth in manufacturing productivity than in any major industrialised country, and faster growth in investment than in any of those countries except Japan. These achievements have helped us over the past seven years to maintain our share of world trade, after 30 years of decline. They made the 1980s the first decade since the war when the United Kingdom grew faster than Germany and France.

MONETARY POLICY

There is one proviso—and it is a crucial one. We must get inflation down, and this time we must keep it down. The overriding lesson of the past few years is that the battle against inflation is never won. It is fatally easy to miss the warning signs, and hard decisions have few friends.

The costs of even a temporary reverse are high. Squeezing out inflation means high interest rates, frustrated hopes, bankruptcies and lost jobs.

But the costs of living with inflation are even higher —as those who remember the 1970s know only too well. Inflation makes our industry uncompetitive; it destroys savings; it creates uncertainty and strife; and a high rate of inflation can quickly get out of control. High rates of inflation are never stable.

Frankly, after the experience of recent years, it surprises me how many people are urging me to let up on inflation. It may not seem much of a threat for the next six or 12 months, but I am concerned with the year after that and with the rest of the decade.

The Government's decision to join the exchange rate mechanism last October provides a more secure

framework for combating inflation in the future. That is its real significance. Linking sterling to other currencies with a proven track record of low inflation will be an added discipline on monetary policy.

We committed ourselves to that discipline after lengthy debate, and our decision was widely supported on both sides of the House, and in the country at large. The time has now come to apply ourselves wholeheartedly to the task of making our membership a success.

So far, it has been. Sterling has traded comfortably within its band during a difficult period. The sterling index is much where it was just before ERM entry, and our patient approach has meant that recent reductions in interest rates have been well received by the markets. They have recognised that they are consistent with our ERM obligations, as well as fully justified by the domestic economy.

Our entry into the ERM means that I have had to reassess the role of domestic indicators in guiding monetary policy. It should go without saying that interest rates will be set to honour our commitment to stay within the ERM band, but there is still a most important role for domestic monetary targets. All the major countries within the ERM take the same view.

Over the past year, M0—the narrow measure of money—has continued to provide timely evidence of monetary developments. Its annual rate of growth has been on a downward trend since last May. Since August, it has been within its target range of 1 to 5 per cent. For the year ahead, I propose to set a new, slightly lower target range of 0 to 4 per cent. That is consistent with my determination to exert further downward pressure on inflation. I shall also continue to watch closely other indicators of monetary conditions, especially M4—the measure of broad money—and asset prices.

There should be no sustained conflict between domestic monetary indicators and our ERM obligations. By far the best way of minimising the risk that conflicts will arise in the future is to build up credibility within the ERM. The policies that are necessary to defeat inflation and to sustain the exchange rate are the same.

For the time being, I have no plans to move to a narrow ERM band. That remains, of course, our longer-term intention, but the timing of the move must depend on the progress we make in reducing inflation.

PUBLIC FINANCE AND FISCAL POLICY

I come now to the public sector finances.

Over the 1980s, my predecessors transformed our public finances and made them the envy of fellow Finance Ministers throughout the world. They first reduced and then eliminated our budget deficit, and in the last three years they repaid £26 billion of debt. The ratio of public sector debt to gross domestic product has been reduced from 50 per cent. in 1979 to under 30 per cent. now, to the benefit of this and future generations.

I am not going to fritter that legacy away. The firm control of public expenditure remains at the centre of our strategy. I will continue to aim for budget balance in the medium term. It is a simple rule, which is well understood and requires the Government to finance their spending honestly.

Our entry into the ERM does not alter the requirement for fiscal policy to buttress monetary policy and play its part in curbing inflation; so sound public finances will remain central to our strategy for the 1990s.

However, it is one of the more reliable laws of economics—not that there are so many—that the budget balance varies markedly over the economic cycle. When activity is growing strongly, tax revenues rise relative to income, and lower unemployment brings lower social security payments. We saw this in operation in the late 1980s when we ran large budget surpluses.

Those forces go into reverse when the economy slows down. That is why the Budget surplus has shrunk over the past two years, and why we are now likely to see the temporary re-emergence of a public sector borrowing requirement.

Those cyclical swings in the budget balance can play a useful role in offsetting the swings in private sector borrowing, and in stabilising the economy. They come about automatically, without the need for difficult judgments about the state of the economy. It is entirely consistent with the medium-term approach that I have already outlined to tolerate those swings in the fiscal position, but I am not persuaded of the case for going beyond that.

In 1990-91, the Government's finances have been affected both by the onset of the recession and by the Gulf war. However, as a result of the assistance we have received from our allies, the net effect of the war on the PSBR has not been as great as we feared. The outturn on the public expenditure planning total is expected to be a little lower than we forecast in the autumn statement. Overall, despite the war, I expect to achieve a further debt repayment this year of approaching £1 billion.

For the year ahead, I judge that a deficit of £8 billion can fairly reflect the strength of cyclical influences. For the same reason, I think it will be right to tolerate a somewhat larger deficit in 1992-93, for it takes time for the effects of lower activity to feed through fully on to revenue. The most notable is corporation tax, which is both highly sensitive to the economic cycle and paid in arrears.

Those deficits will disappear once output has returned to normal levels—just as the surpluses of the late 1980s did. Prudence dictates that I base my fiscal plans on a gradual recovery in output to its long-term trend. This implies a correspondingly gradual return to budget balance, but in practice the speed with which this happens will depend on the exact course of the upturn.

To summarise: for the year ahead, I am budgeting for a PSBR of £8 billion, 1¼ per cent. of GDP, and I expect a somewhat larger deficit in the following year. These deficits reflect the effect of lower activity on the public finances and are fully consistent with the aim of a balanced budget over the economic cycle.

In order to hold to this prudent fiscal stance, my Budget today will have a broadly neutral effect in the coming year, but will produce a modest increase in revenue in 1992-93.

BUSINESS TAXATION

I now turn to my tax proposals. In preparing this part of my speech I have been guided by great Finance Ministers of the past—first, by Gladstone, whose advice on delivering tax proposals to the House of Commons was:

"Get up your figures thoroughly . . . and then give them out as if the whole House was interested".

Secondly, I have perhaps been influenced by Colbert, the French Finance Minister, who said:

"The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing".

In framing my tax proposals, I have also sought to address a number of the concerns which have been put to me and to carry foward the process of tax reform initiated by my predecessors. Above all, I have produced a Budget for business. I therefore begin with business taxation.

In this country, there are 50,000 large companies paying the main rate of corporation tax, nearly 1 million other companies and 3 million unincorporated businesses, many of them very small, employing a handful of people at most. We should never forget those firms. My measures are designed to benefit businesses in each of those categories.

I have been particularly concerned about businesses which are experiencing cash flow problems, often made worse by late-paying customers. I shall therefore be announcing measures which should give immediate help to businesses' liquidity.

My first proposals concern the value added tax regime. For 18 years, ever since VAT was introduced, the rule has been that businesses become liable for VAT when they send out bills, not when they are paid, so some traders end up paying VAT even though their customers never pay them. In his Budget last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister introduced an entirely new system for giving traders relief on bad debts. That comes into effect on 1 April and extends relief to all bad debts which are at least two years old.

Many business organisations have complained to me that that waiting period is too long. I now propose to reduce it from two years to one. This will enable businesses to claim relief next year on the bad debts that they incurred in 1990-91 and 1989-90. The new scheme will boost businesses' cash flow next year by some £340 million.

Actually, for the smallest firms, the problem of reclaiming VAT on bad debts need not arise in the first place because they can use the cash accounting scheme. That allows smaller firms to pay no VAT at all until they receive payment from their customers. Well over 100,000 traders are already using the scheme, but we estimate that a further 300,000 could do so. Customs and Excise will therefore be taking steps to publicise the cash accounting scheme more widely.

There is another aspect of the VAT regime which I know causes concern—the operation of the serious misdeclaration penalty, which came into effect last April. There have been widespread complaints that the automatic penalty that it imposes—30 per cent. of the tax wrongly declared—is too severe and unfair to those who make minor mistakes.

I accept that the penalty in its current form is an unnecessarily blunt instrument. We will therefore undertake a thorough review so that the SMP system can be reformed in the 1992 Finance Bill. I have also asked Customs to make some immediate changes to the rules, giving traders more time to put mistakes right themselves without incurring a penalty. I do not wish to pre-empt the review but, while it takes place, I am reducing the rate of penalty from 30 per cent. to 20 per cent.

Accounting for VAT can be an onerous duty for small traders. When VAT was introduced, we exempted firms with the lowest turnovers from registration. Since then, the registration threshold has been indexed.

European Community constraints have meant that, in the past, we have not been able to increase the threshold by more than the rate of inflation. At the end of last year, however, we pressed the case with the Commission to increase the VAT threshold. It responded very positively, and I therefore feel able to go far beyond indexation and to increase the turnover limit for registration by no less than 40 per cent. to £35,000, taking it to its highest level in real terms since the introduction of VAT in 1973. This will benefit up to 150,000 traders. The cost of raising this threshold will be £25 million in the first year, rising to £40 million in 1993-94.

I have two further deregulatory measures to announce, which will benefit very small businesses. At present, all employers have to pay over the pay-as-you-earn and national insurance contributions that they collect from their employees 14 days after the end of each month, but the burden of collection falls unevenly. Large firms are amply compensated for the trouble and cost of collecting the tax by the benefits of holding the money for this period, but small employers are not.

I have a proposal that will reduce the burden on some 700,000 smaller employers. From May onwards, employers making PAYE and national insurance payments of less than £400 each month will pay quarterly, not monthly. This will reduce the administrative burden on firms and help their cash flow, at a one-off cost to the Exchequer of £210 million.

I have one further measure to announce to help very small businesses account for tax. Last year, for the first time, businesses with a turnover below £10,000 were allowed to send the Inland Revenue a simple three-line statement instead of detailed business accounts. This is an important deregulatory measure which cuts out time-consuming paper work for up to 1 million people. From April 1992, I propose to raise the £10,000 limit, so as to allow up to ½ million more people to benefit.

There is a case for making a more radical simplification of the taxation of the self-employed. The Inland Revenue will shortly be publishing a consultative document containing our proposals.

I am concerned that the system of income tax appeals can sometimes operate unfairly, in particular because there is no provision for the award of costs. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and I want to deal with criticisms by the Council on Tribunals about the absence of proper rules for hearing tax appeals. We shall be publishing a consultative paper which will include proposals about the award of costs where either party has acted unreasonably.

I have one proposal to limit the impact of capital gains tax on entrepreneurs and on our growing venture capital industry. I have in mind particularly those who may give up safe managerial positions to set out on the risky road of running their own business. For those people, the possibility of a large capital gains tax charge can be a deterrent. I have considered whether it would be suitable

and sensible to introduce specific rules for venture capital, but I have concluded that that would be extremely difficult.

However, one way in which we can help business men and women to reap the rewards of their efforts is to improve the relief available to them when they retire and have to realise the asset that they have created. That is why I propose to reduce the qualifying age for capital gains tax retirement relief from 60 to 55, and to raise the limits on it. From today, the first £150,000 of capital gains and half of the next £450,000 will be exempt from capital gains tax. This will be a powerful incentive to entrepreneurs to start new businesses.

I have one other important change relating to capital gains tax on small businesses. Under existing law, only companies can offset their trading losses against their capital gains. I propose to give unincorporated businesses similar treatment. This will help small businesses if they wish to sell off assets to help themselves through a difficult period.

In addition to the measures that I have announced for small business, I wish to propose some changes to corporation tax. In his Budget last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the profit limits that govern the corporation tax rates paid by smaller companies. He increased the ceiling below which single companies pay corporation tax at 25 per cent. from £150,000 to £200,000, and the upper limit above which they pay the full rate from £750,000 to £1 million.

I propose this year to raise the limits again by a quarter. That means a total increase of 150 per cent. in three years. As a result, companies will need to be earning profits of more than £250,000 before they are liable to pay more than 25 per cent. Companies will not have to pay the full rate of corporation tax until their profits reach £1,250,000 a year. This will benefit 30,000 companies.

In 1984, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby made a radical reform of corporation tax. In his time as Chancellor, the main rate of corporation tax was reduced in stages from 52 per cent. to 35 per cent., thus boosting companies' post-tax profits, encouraging profitable investment at home and overseas and increasing the incentive for overseas firms to invest in Britain.

I believe that the philosophy behind his reforms—to widen the tax base, but to reduce the rates—was the right one. It is a policy that has been welcomed by industry. It allows business men, and not Governments, to decide how much to invest and in what to invest. It set the pattern for similar reforms in many countries throughout the world and ushered in an increase in investment of 50 per cent. between 1984 and 1990.

I propose today to take a further step in that direction. Corporation tax rates have remained unchanged at 35 per cent. since 1986, but since then the basic rate of income tax has been reduced from 30p to 25p and the top rate from 60p to 40p. I believe that the time has come to cut the main rate of corporation tax again.

However, I am also aware that cutting the rate of corporation tax only helps companies that are making a profit. Many businesses that have prospered in recent years have moved into loss this year. A cut in corporation tax does not help them and nor, in some cases, do existing arrangements for the carry-back of losses.

I am taking two measures to improve company cash flow. I am cutting by 1 per cent. to 34 per cent. the main rate of corporation tax, applied retrospectively to profits earned in the financial year 1990. This will give an immediate boost to the cash flow of companies that were profitable in the year just ending. It will benefit not only companies paying at the main rate, but the 30,000 other companies with profits between the lower and upper profits limits.

To help profitable companies that have just moved into loss, I propose to extend the carry-back period for trading losses from one year to three. That means that more companies making losses will qualify for tax rebates in 1992-93—valued at £250 million—which will help them to carry on through this difficult period.

My main concern in this Budget is to encourage profitable firms to go on investing in Britain's future. The best way in which to do that is to increase still further the post-tax return on successful investment projects. For that reason, I am cutting the main rate of corporation tax on profits earned in the 1991 financial year by two percentage points, to 33 per cent.

The two reductions in the main rate, from 35 to 33 per cent, will together cost £380 million in 1991-92 and £830 million in 1992-93. They will give us the lowest rate among our major competitors—lower than that of the United States, and the lowest in the European Community.

SUPPLY SIDE

The 1980s were years of remarkable progress in our economy, but even more striking was the change in attitudes. The crucial importance of the market is now widely accepted in this country, and even more widely accepted in the House. There is a much greater acknowledgement of the fact that market forces and competition play a vital part in shaping our economy. That remarkable change in ideas and attitudes is the lasting legacy and achievement of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

My right hon. Friend recognised that the key to a better performance by the economy in the long term lay in improving the supply side; and, over the past decade, that has been the aim of our tax policy, trade union and labour market reform, our competition policy, deregulation and privatisation. But, if the United Kingdom economy is to perform to its full potential, we still need a more flexible labour market and a better-skilled work force. I have a number of further measures to announce to that end.

If wages are inflexible, the burden of recession falls disproportionately on jobs: it is the only way for employers to cut costs. There is a considerable prize if we can get pay to take some of the strain. In 1987, we introduced a new tax relief to get profit-related pay off the ground. There are now about 1,250 such schemes in total, involving nearly 300,000 employees; but there can and should be many more, so I propose to make the scheme more attractive.

At present, half an employee's profit-related pay is tax-free. From 1 April, PRP will be free of all tax up to the present limits. It is worth up to a full £1,000 to a basic-rate taxpayer. For some, that could be worth as much as 6p off the income tax rate.

There is another way in which employees can and should enjoy a stake in the companies for which they work—through becoming shareholders in them. Employee share schemes have made a great deal of progress over the past 10 years. By the end of March last year, 2¼ million employees had benefited from shares or options worth

more than £6·5 billion. Too often, however, employee share schemes have been directed solely at highly paid company executives. I believe strongly that valuable benefits of this kind should be extended to the whole work force.

I have given serious consideration to limiting executive share schemes solely to companies with all-employee schemes in place, but I have instead decided to rely on the carrot rather than the stick. From January next year, the price of shares under executive options may be set at a modest discount of up to 15 per cent. of the shares' market value if—but only if—the company has an all-employee share scheme.

I also propose to increase substantially the limits on individual participation in approved all-employee share schemes, and to allow companies tax relief on the costs that they incur in setting up approved employee share schemes and statutory employee share ownership plans.

Another aspect of the supply side that needs improvement is training. A well-trained labour force is an important element in any firm's success. Employers know that and are acting on it. The 1990 labour force survey shows an 85 per cent. increase in the number of employees receiving job-related training since 1984. Despite the recession, the last CBI trends survey reported that over 75 per cent. of employers expected to spend at least as much on training in the next 12 months as they had last year and 29 per cent. expected to spend even more.

However, more and more individuals are also choosing to take responsibility for their own training. Employers can get relief on the training they provide as a normal business expense, yet at present the tax system generally gives no relief to an individual who decides to pay for training to improve his or her skills.

That cannot be right. If we want a better trained, more flexible work force, we should encourage people who want to help themselves. I propose to do just that. I am introducing a tax relief for the fees paid by an individual for training towards most national vocational qualifications and their Scottish equivalents. From April 1992, basic rate tax will be deducted automatically from the fees for qualifying courses, so non-taxpayers will benefit as well as taxpayers. Among those who stand to gain are women wishing to get back to work after having children.

OTHER BUSINESS MEASURES

Many hon. Members have pressed the case for helping two specific industries this year: shipping and films. While I sympathise with their aims, I have to say that there is a limit to the extent to which we can—or should—bend the tax regime to meet the special needs of any particular industry.

The Gulf hostilities have reminded us of the important contribution which our Merchant Navy can make to our defence. I recognise that there is a strategic case for measures to encourage shipping companies to draw their crews from seamen in the United Kingdom, who would be willing and able to serve in time of war. Towards this end, I propose a further relaxation of the rules giving tax relief to seafarers working mainly overseas. This will mean that more seafarers will be exempt from United Kingdom tax on their overseas earnings.

The film industry makes an important contribution to entertainment and culture in this country. The industry has put forward a number of proposals, but having studied these carefully, I am afraid I cannot accept them. However, I remain sympathetic, and if it has any alternative proposals that it wishes to put to me over the coming year, I will very happily consider them.

I know that the tax treatment of foreign exchange gains and losses causes difficulties for many businesses. This is one of the most complex and intractable areas of the tax code. Our 1989 consultative document elicited a valuable response but no consensus on the way forward. I am publishing today a further document setting out my specific proposals for reform, which I trust will bring greater rationality to this very important and complex area of the tax system.

I have also to correct one defect in the law affecting building societies. In a recent judgment, the House of Lords concluded that regulations covering the 1986 composite rate transitional provisions for building societies were technically invalid. If I were to take no action about this, there would be a windfall gain to building societies—not their depositors—of £250 million, distributed arbitrarily according to their accounting dates in 1985-86. I have therefore decided to include legislation in the Finance Bill to establish, as the Government and Parliament intended, that interest and dividends paid by societies in these transitional periods may be taxed at 1985-86 rates.

TRUSTS

I turn now to trusts. In 1988, as Financial Secretary, I announced a review of their tax treatment. Today, I am publishing a consultative document on possible changes to the income tax and capital gains tax regime of United Kingdom resident trusts. My proposals include an alternative structure of tax rates, which would bring the treatment of trusts more into line with the treatment of individuals. They would also help to streamline the administration of trusts, saving work for trustees and their advisers.

We have also been reviewing the tax treatment of non-resident trusts. This raises an important issue of principle. In recent years, the use of non-resident trusts as a means of avoiding capital gains tax has increased. I do not think that it is right for a relatively small number of wealthy people to shift very large assets into offshore trusts simply in order to avoid United Kingdom tax. Such people have already benefited from the reductions in the higher rate of income tax. I therefore propose to introduce measures to counter this tax avoidance and to prevent a revenue loss of up to £100 million in a full year.

CHARITIES

I turn now to charities. While people's real incomes have risen by over a third since 1979, charitable giving has more than doubled, partly as a result of the measures taken by my predecessors to encourage more giving. Tax reliefs for charities are now worth at least £800 million a year. Today I have some modest improvements to announce to the tax regime for charities.

I have two measures that should boost giving by businesses. The first is a new relief from income and corporation tax to encourage business gifts of equipment to schools and to other educational establishments.

The second concerns the gift aid scheme introduced last year. This allows companies and individuals to get tax

relief on cash donations to charities up to a limit of £5 million a year, under the gift aid scheme. Company groups have found that the division of this upper limit between them prevents them from donating as much as they would like. To overcome this problem, I propose to abolish the limit altogether from today. In recent years, there has been a remarkable increase in corporate donations to charities. I hope that this further measure will encourage companies to give even more.

I also propose to adjust some existing VAT reliefs for charities and to ease the conditions for the relief from car tax for vehicles leased to disabled people.

SPORT AND THE ARTS

I now come to a proposal to benefit both sport and the arts. Last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minster reduced pool betting duty, on the condition that the benefit was passed to the Football Trust. Following the success of that measure, a proposal has been put to me by one of the pools promoters for a new foundation for both sport and the arts.

League football benefited from last year's Budget measure, and racing benefits from the horse racing betting levy. This new foundation is intended to provide assistance to other sports and to the arts. It will be financed by contributions collected by the pools promoters along with the weekly pools betting stakes, and should raise some £40 million a year.

On the understanding that all the main pools companies agree to participate and that the full amount would be passed on to a new trust established on satisfactory terms, I would be willing to reduce pool betting duty a final time—from 40 per cent. to 37½ per cent. These arrangements would be subject to a review in four years' time. They should make a further £20 million a year available—giving £60 million a year in total—to the foundation in order to support both sport and the arts.

EXCISE DUTIES

I now come to excise duties. First, I propose to raise the duties on alcoholic drinks to maintain their real value. That means that the duties will rise from 6 o'clock tonight by 9·3 per cent.—in line with the increase in the retail prices index in the year to December 1990. That will put about 2p on a pint of beer, 9p on a bottle of wine and around 56p on a bottle of spirits.

I will also be legislating to change the basis on which beer is taxed. The existing system of taxing the so-called "worts" was introduced by my predecessor, Mr. Gladstone. It will now be replaced by one in which the end product, the beer itself, is taxed. The new system will relate the duty more closely to the alcoholic strength of the beer —with a higher tax levied on strong lagers than on low alcohol beers.

I propose increasing all tobacco duties by 15 per cent. —well above the rate of inflation. This will add about 16p to the price of a packet of 20 king size cigarettes, and, I regret to say, around 8p to a packet of small cigars.

There are strong health arguments for a big duty increase on tobacco. In recent years, the duty has fallen in real terms, and cigarette consumption, having declined in the early 1980s, has since begun to turn up again. Raising the duty will help to counter this unwelcome trend.

The motor car imposes large costs on others in the form of pollution and congestion. I have decided therefore to increase the duties on petrol and DERV by 15 per cent, giving the private motorist a strong incentive to choose more fuel-efficient vehicles, and ensuring that those who pollute most, pay most. This is fully in line with the policy set out last year in the Government's White Paper on the environment.

A litre of leaded petrol will rise by nearly 4p, a litre of unleaded by about 3p and a litre of diesel by just over 3p. The tax differential between leaded and unleaded will increase, giving a further boost to the take-up of unleaded. I propose to freeze vehicle excise duty for private cars and light vehicles at £100, for the sixth year running, and also to freeze VED for all heavy goods vehicles.

BENEFITS IN KIND

Many motorists do not own their own cars but drive those provided by their employers. The scales for taxing the private use of company cars have been substantially increased in recent Budgets, but many employers continue to pay their employees in cars rather than in money. I propose to increase the car scales again this year by 20 per cent. This increase will yield £190 million in 1991-92 and £250 million in 1992-93.

If people are paid in kind, there is no reason why they should be taxed more lightly than people paid in cash, yet our present system also gives employers an incentive to provide employees with cars rather than cash. Under our present arrangements, they avoid making any contribution to the national insurance fund on the benefit that the employee receives from private use of a car.

I propose that company cars and fuel should now become liable for national insurance contributions, assessed according to the scale charges used for taxation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will introduce a Bill to that end. Employers will pay at the main rate, but there will be no change for employees.

Employers' national insurance contributions on cars and fuel will yield an extra £610 million a year of contributions. This will reduce an anomaly in the national insurance contributions system, making it more neutral between different kinds of payment, and will widen the national insurance contributions base.

These new arrangements will take effect from April, but contributions will be collected annually in arrears, so employers will not be asked to pay their first contribution until June 1992. They are already familiar with the scale charges used for the tax so they should be able to make the necessary calculations with the minimum of extra work. They are already familiar with the scale charges.

I turn now to what I regard as one of the greatest scourges of modern life. I refer to the mobile telephone. I propose to bring the benefit of car phones into income tax and to simplify the tax treatment of mobile phones by introducing a standard charge on the private use of such phones provided by an employer. Tax will be paid of £200 for each phone for 1991-92. I hope that, as a result of this measure, restaurants will be quieter and the roads will be safer.

SAVING

I have already drawn attention to the imbalance between savings and investment and its effects in the late 1980s. As companies found more and more opportunities to invest, we needed more savings; but instead, the saving ratio fell. In successive Budgets, my predecessors introduced new tax incentives to save. Many forms of saving now enjoy a highly privileged tax position.

Last year in particular, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a new scheme, the tax-exempt special savings account, TESSA has proved a spectacular success since it arrived on the savings scene nearly three months ago, and has encouraged the savings habit among ordinary taxpayers. Already, over 1·5 million people have opened accounts.

My right hon. Friend also announced in his Budget last year the abolition of composite rate tax. From 6 April, non-taxpayers will no longer have to pay tax on their accounts with banks and building societies. These are far-reaching reforms, which need time to settle down and take effect, so this is not the year to disturb the regime that we have just put in place, or to risk causing confusion with further schemes. My main concern has been to consolidate the system that we already have, although I have some modest changes to announce.

I propose to raise the capital gains annual exempt amount to £5,500 and the inheritance tax threshold to £140,000 this year in line with inflation.

National Savings continue to play an important role, particularly for small savers. This summer, I propose to introduce a new National Savings children's bond for children under 16. There will also be a new issue of fixed-interest savings certificates, with a maximum investment of £5,000 compared with £1,000 on the last issue. Other changes to National Savings products will be set out in a press release issued today.

I am also removing the restrictions on friendly societies writing tax-exempt life insurance policies for children, and increasing the limit on premiums for their tax-exempt policies generally from £150 to £200.

Personal equity plans remain an important means of promoting direct share ownership. Since their introduction in 1987, about 1·2 million PEPs have been taken out, and over £3 billion has been invested. I have some further changes to announce.

First, I intend to allow investment in European Community, as well as United Kingdom, shares both for individuals and for unit and investment trusts. Second, to promote the development of single-company PEPs, I propose to allow investors to put up to £3,000 a year in a single-company PEP, as well as up to £6,000 a year, as now, in a general plan. This will allow total investments of £9,000 a year.

While single-company PEPs are available to any investor, I believe that they provide a natural home for shares acquired under employee share schemes. I therefore propose to allow shares acquired under approved all-employee share schemes to be transferred directly into the company PEP, with no charge to capital gains tax.

Employee share schemes and PEPs have encouraged individuals to become shareholders, but many people have bought their first shares in big offers, mainly privatisations. The first of these to catch the public's imagination was British Telecom. The Government currently still own some 48 per cent. of the shares, and I can announce today that I intend to sell part of this holding in the coming year.

Privatisations have been a great success. The next step is to encourage people to invest in shares more generally. One problem is that, to the small investor, the stock market can seem remote, intimidating and somewhat expensive. The development of a genuine retail market for shares in high streets up and down the country would be highly desirable.

To give this the boost it deserves, the Government are considering a change in the way in which they market privatisations. For future large flotations, I am today inviting proposals from the private sector for arrangements to distribute shares directly to the public through high street retail networks.

I hope that there will be proposals both from financial institutions—banks or building societies—and from companies outside the financial sector. If satisfactory proposals can be developed in time, I will consider using such a high-street network in the sale of British Telecom shares.

Such a high street network could be used for primary issues, not only by the Government but by private sector companies and, in the longer term, it could provide a cheap and accessible way for individuals to buy and sell in the secondary market.

MORTGAGE INTEREST RELIEF

The measures that I have just announced will encourage people to save, but there is another side to the story, for the fall in the saving ratio at the end of the 1980s was a result not of a fall in gross savings so much as an increase in borrowing, particularly mortgage borrowing.

In part, that reflected the remarkable increase in home ownership over the last decade. That has been, and remains, a key objective of policy for the Government. A less desirable development, however, was the dramatic boom in house prices during the late 1980s, which fuelled borrowing and helped boost inflation. Many first-time buyers found prices rising much faster than their incomes. We need to do all we can to ensure that, when recovery comes, it is not accompanied by another bout of house price inflation, with the unwelcome consequences that that would have for inflation and interest rates.

I propose to leave the ceiling for mortgage interest relief unchanged at £30,000, but from 6 April 1991 I propose that relief should be allowed only at the basic rate. That will yield £220 million in 1991-92 on the basis of current interest rates, and £420 million in 1992-93.

I recognise that some people have arranged their affairs on the assumption that higher rate relief will continue. Therefore, to reduce the amount of extra tax they have to pay, I propose to increase the starting point for higher rate tax from £20,700 to £23,700, £1,000 more than required to match inflation. That will keep the number of higher rate payers broadly stable and mean that a married man will not become liable to higher rate tax until his earnings rise to nearly £29,000.

My objective is to reduce the tax subsidy to borrowing without significantly increasing the average tax burden on higher rate taxpayers. Taking those changes with the changes to the personal allowances that I am about to

announce, the typical increase in liability for a higher rate taxpayer with a £30,000 mortgage will be only around £1 a week.

Of course, the main determinant of the cost of a mortgage is not tax relief, but interest rates. For a higher rate taxpayer with a £50,000 mortgage, the fall in the typical mortgage rate that has already taken place since last autumn fully offsets the change that I am making to mortgage interest relief.

INCOME TAXES

I now come to income tax. Income tax is never welcome, but paying tax unexpectedly is even less so. That is the position facing employees who were working in Kuwait and Iraq at the time the Gulf crisis began. They may now become liable to pay United Kingdom tax on their foreign earnings which they had expected to be exempt. I propose that employees who had intended to work in Kuwait or Iraq for a year or more but were forced to return home earlier by the crisis should not be taxed on their foreign earnings.

I have no changes to make to either the basic rate or the higher rate of income tax. Our objective remains to move towards a basic rate of 20p, but I cannot make further progress towards it this year. Our priority must be to reduce taxes on business.

I propose this year to uprate the personal allowance in line with inflation. It will rise by £290 to £3,295. The personal allowance for the over-65s will increase by £350 to £4,020, and for those aged 75 and over by £360 to £4,180. The married couple's allowances for the elderly will also be increased in line with inflation, from £2,145 and £2,185 to £2,355 and £2,395. The income limit for the allowances for the elderly will increase by £1,200 to £13,500.

However, I am not proposing to increase the married couple's allowance for couples under 65 or the allowances that are linked to it. They will stay at £1,720.

I know that there is a widespread view in the House and in the country that more should be done to help families with children. I propose to use the resources released by not increasing the married couple's allowance for that purpose.

There are some, I know, who advocate the reintroduction of child tax allowances. I have looked at that option carefully, but I am clear—especially following the introduction of independent taxation—that it would not be an effective way of channelling resources to those who need them. A better way of directing help straight into the pockets of mothers, whether they choose to work or not, is child benefit. It goes to all families—to the children of non-taxpayers as well as the children of taxpayers.

I therefore propose to increase child benefit from 7 October by £1 a week for the first eligible child in each family, and by 25p a week for other children. These rises come on top of the increase announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security last autumn, which will be paid from 8 April. This means that, in October this year, a benefit of £9·25 a week will be payable for the first child, and £7·50 for each subsequent child.

We will ensure that the increases benefit not only taxpayers but the very poorest families—those on income support and family credit. These increases will help 6·8 million families, and 12·3 million children. I should add that the Government have decided that the new levels of child benefit will be uprated in line with inflation next April and in subsequent years.

CENTRAL AND LOCAL TAXATION

The measures that I have announced today maintain a responsible fiscal policy, while giving help to industry and families. They also include some important reforms to the tax system. However, my Budget would not be complete if it did not address one other issue, which has attracted a certain amount of attention recently.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be annoucing very soon the conclusions of our review of local government. I do not propose to anticipate his statement, but there is one announcement I want to make today.

In January, we announced a £1 billion package to reduce the community charge for more than half of all charge payers. Since then, I have been considering whether the impact of local expenditure on the local taxpayer is too great for any system of local taxation to bear.

I have concluded that local taxes are being asked to bear too large a burden, and that the level of the community charge is still too high. However, if local taxes are to fall, and if the standard of local services is to be maintained, taxes elsewhere must rise.

I propose, therefore, to make a substantial switch from local taxation to central taxation. This will amount to about £4½ billion in the coming financial year—1991-92—and will reduce the net yield of local taxation to about £7 billion. This large reduction in local taxation will take it to a level that the Government believe should be sustainable in the longer term.

We shall introduce a Bill in the next few days to authorise payments of extra grant to local authorities, and to ensure that community charge payers will reap the full benefit in reduced charges in the coming year—1991-92. The money will not be available to increase local authority spending. Domestic rate bills in Northern Ireland will be reduced as well.

The Bill will also ensure that charge payers do not have to start paying their charges until the new and lower charges have been introduced. Later today, my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council will make a statement about the arrangements for the Bill. The switch requires a substantial increase in central taxation. I have decided that this should be achieved by raising indirect taxes—that is to say, taxes on spending.

I am proposing, therefore, from 1 April to increase the standard rate of value added tax by two and a half percentage points to 17½ per cent. VAT is a broadly based tax which falls on consumers rather than producers. Since much consumer spending is zero-rated, it bears less heavily on poorer households than on the better-off, so raising VAT is not only an efficient but also a fair way to raise the necessary finance; and raising taxes on spending rather than taxes on income will be better for savings, and consistent with our strategy for tax reform, first set down by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) in his 1979 Budget.

Raising VAT will increase some prices, but the reduction in the community charge will more than offset that effect, so the switch will actually reduce the retail prices index. As a result of these changes, the community charges recently announced in England, Wales and Scotland will be cut by £140. On average, the headline

charge will be reduced from about £390 to about £250 in both England and Scotland, and from about £260 to about £120 in Wales, while the amounts people actually have to pay, after allowing for relief and benefits, will fall to under £175 in Great Britain. The charge in Shetland will fall to under £1.

PERORATION

The measures I have announced are designed to meet the three main requirements of any Budget. First, they represent sound finance, and contribute to a firm counter-inflationary policy. My predecessors transformed public finances in the 1980s; my proposals will keep us on track to balance the budget over the 1990s. Secondly, they respond to the economic needs of the moment. I have cut taxes on business, both this year and next, to help it to weather the recession and take advantage of the upturn later in the year. Thirdly, they continue the reform of the tax system to improve the working of the economy in the longer term. In addition, in a year when resources are tight, I have been able to give additional help to families with children. Finally, I have made a decisive reduction in the burden of local taxation across the country, and cut community charges in the coming year by £140.

This Budget is good for business, good for families, good for charge payers and good for the country. I commend it to the House.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Spirits (motion No. 2);
(b) Beer (rate of duty) (motion No. 3);
(c) Wine and made-wine (motion No. 5);
(d) Cider (motion No. 6);
(e) Tobacco products (motion No. 7);
(f) Hydrocarbon oil (motion No. 8);
(g) Vehicles excise duty (rates) (motion No. 9);
(h) Vehicles excise duty (exemptions: 1) (motion No.10); and
(i) Value added tax (penalty for serious misdeclaration) (motion No. 15).—*[Mr. Norman Lamont]*

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means Motions), and agreed to.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;
(b) for refunding any amount of tax, otherwise than by virtue of goods or services supplied to one person being treated for the purposes of section 14(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 as supplied to another person;
(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or
(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

[Relevant document: European Community document No. 4433/91 on the Annual Economic Report 1990-91.]

4.49 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): As is customary and traditional, I begin by congratulating the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the way in which he delivered his Budget speech. My congratulations are even warmer than they would otherwise have been because he has provided us with what must be the biggest climb-down in modern political history. After two years of wasting £10 billion on the misery, injustice and inefficiency of the poll tax, we find the Government backing off that which was, but less than a year ago, their flagship. There will, however, be less rejoicing over the fact that the right hon. Gentleman proposes to collect more in VAT; despite his protestations, that is not a fair way to collect additional taxation. By definition, the tax is regressive—for people on average incomes and low incomes. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, it is not."] Oh yes it is. It takes a disproportionate amount from those on average and lower incomes, and everybody knows it.

Not content with a debate over whether we were to have a head tax or a granny tax or a bedroom tax, the right hon. Gentleman introduces a system of raising taxation to pay for local government services which will tax even children's sweets. It is hard to imagine a tax with a broader scoop—and all to try to bail the Government out of the stupidity of the poll tax mess that they have created.

That is not to mention all the disasters that will be inflicted—this is not an overstatement—on the cash flow of local government as it tries to cope with an entirely different system of providing the revenue to pay for local services. We shall watch the system and examine it in close detail, and we shall be amazed if the Chancellor gets from the British public the response that he seeks. They hated the poll tax and they will hate this con just as much.

There are elements in the Budget that we have cause to welcome. As my right hon. Friends remarked during the speech, there will be dancing in the streets of Islwyn, Sparkbrook and Monklands, East in the wake of the imposition of taxes on mobile phones—which the Chancellor described as attacking what he called one of the greatest scourges of modern times. He must have a peculiar perspective; when he said that I imagined he was about to deal with all the iniquities of the poll tax.

[Mr. Neil Kinnock]

Nevertheless, there is much agreement on, for instance, the assistance to be given to small businesses. We called last year for the VAT relief on bad debts of more than a year, and we give it all the warmer a welcome for that. Raising the VAT threshold to £35,000 for small businesses is also welcome. The Opposition have joined small businesses and many Conservative Members in urging that. The simplification and reduction of small firms' corporation tax liabilities are sensible.

The only problem with the other changes that the Chancellor proposes to make in the corporation tax of firms of a variety of sizes is that, although they certainly need relief because of the difficulties that they have experienced in recent years—it amounts to £380 million this year, says the Chancellor, and £800 million in future years—we must make the point that if the Chancellor had such resources they could have been better used on capital allowances which would in turn encourage the movement of more investment into manufacturing industry. That point will be the subject of further debate between the two sides of the House.

We warmly welcome the announced limitation of mortgage tax relief to the basic rate of income tax. That has been our policy for several years now, and the Chancellor—inadvertently, I am sure—has made our job much easier when we form the Government after the next general election.

By way of a final immediate response to the Budget I must mention the changes announced in respect of child benefit. Judging from the hype, I had thought that the right hon. Gentleman would perform another spectacular somersault in this area and that he would roll back the years of the former Prime Minister and previous Chancellors during which the value of child benefit was significantly reduced. I had expected from a family man some understanding of just how significant child benefit is to large numbers of families on average and below average incomes. Instead we are given the postponed payment of an extra £1 for the first child and 25p for other children. I wonder that the right hon. Gentleman had the gall to come and announce 25p. He must have some idea, even on his income, of the expenses involved in bringing up children. His failure to recognise what those expenses mean for working families and families without jobs shows a contempt for their interests.

To restore child benefit to its level when the Government froze it, the Government would have had to increase it by £2·30 for children other than the first child and by £1·30 for the first child. Their failure to do that shows that they are continuing their bias of 12 years' standing against people on modest incomes and in favour of the best-off people in the country.

This is the Chancellor's first Budget and it is also the first since Britain became an exchange rate mechanism economy. This Budget is presented just 21 months before the completion of the single market in the European Community. It is also being presented in a recession. Given those dominating factors, it was only reasonable to expect that the Chancellor would deal with them directly in the Budget. We expected him to face up squarely to the challenges posed by the conditions that our economy faces. He did not. Instead, he dodged; he gave us a short-term Budget—a tinkering Budget. It will not stop the slump. It will not help to build strength for the future. It will do nothing to enhance the competitiveness of British industry.

As the completion of the single market draws nearer, we see in the economies of our competitors economic growth and investment performance that vastly exceed those of this country, under this Government. The Chancellor spoke of recession everywhere, but let us put that into perspective. In Italy, growth is running at 2·4 per cent. and investment at 4·1 per cent. In France, growth is at 2 per cent. and investment at 3 per cent. In Germany, growth is running at 4·8 per cent. and investment at 5 per cent. In Britain, after 12 years under this Government, growth is minus 2 per cent. and overall investment is minus 3·4 per cent. In a country that used to be the workshop of the world, manufacturing investment essential to any future success of our economy is falling by 15 per cent. year on year. Yesterday's figures on manufacturing output showed a fall of 8 per cent. this year.

The Chancellor should have made a statement of shame about such figures and such a performance. Nothing like that is occurring in any comparable economy. Other countries are building up their economies in the approach to 1992 whereas the Government are running down the British economy. The Budget will not help to get Britain back to the growth or investment levels of our competitors before the single market is completed.

Last week, the Prime Minister said that he wants Britain to be

"where we belong, at the very heart of Europe".

It is a commendable aspiration, which is shared by many of us. The trouble is that, after these Tory years, we shall be not at the heart of Europe, where we belong, but at the tail of Europe, where the Government have put us. The Budget will not stop that occurring.

In the wake of the Budget, unemployment will continue to rise, firms will continue to close and businesses will continue to fail. The cut in interest rates that we expect today, before the end of the week or some time next week, should help to mitigate all the pressure of the slump. However, although the cut is necessary and welcome, it will not be enough to stop the recession spreading and deepening. The damage that the Government's policies have done to the economy, to industry and to services is so deep and wide that the effects of a slump made in Downing street will continue for a long time to come.

In Britain now, 3,000 jobs are being lost and a hundred businesses fail every day. But industries and firms that go out of production today are unlikely to reappear tomorrow. There is a permanent loss of industrial capacity. Since the second world war, Britain has been through that experience only once before—in the last Tory slump, less than 10 years ago.

The Chancellor said that recessions are always painful. Our only experience of recessions is under Governments whom he supports. It is no accident. The genuine worldwide slump in the wake of oil price rises in the mid-1970s hit every industrial country—indeed, every country. It is more than a coincidence that the only two other recessions that we have experienced since 1945 have been under Conservative Governments. The difference between the last recession and this one is that this time the Government's policies are even killing off the survivors. Companies that managed to pull through the last recession have been unable to beat this one, and enterprises formed and built since the last recession have been wiped out.

Firms of all sizes are burdened by debt, including so-called distress borrowing, which now runs at over £20 billion—some say as much as £25 billion. Companies are borrowing to survive, not for investment, development or expansion. Redundancy notices and bankruptcy lists are not confined to the so-called old or traditional industries, but have affected electronics and aerospace, machine tools and textiles, software, construction and engineering industries. Well-managed, progressive and forward-looking companies are going down. Unemployment is gripping the south and the midlands, just as it is going up, yet again, in Scotland, Wales and the north of England.

So many of the people who are victims of the recession were promised an economic miracle. The Government encouraged them to borrow and spend and told them that they were part of an "enterprise society". Those people testify daily to the fact that they have been deceived and betrayed by a Government for which many of them voted.

In his economic survey this afternoon—his Budget retrospective—the Chancellor hardly gave a word or a thought to those people or to their jobs, industries or futures. If he had made an extensive reference to them and their difficulties, he would have had to say how deep the recession really was and where it came from. If he had done that, he would have had to condemn the ex-Chancellor, his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

That is not simply my judgment. An experienced commentator recently reported:

"The Chancellor . . . is . . . tightly boxed in by factors not so much of his own making, but that of his predecessor—and his predecessor but one".

That was said by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who was reporting—and no doubt earning a few bob in the course of doing so—in the *Daily Express*. No one could describe him as unfavourable to the Prime Minister because he was among the first to say that the present Prime Minister was the most natural successor to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

I suppose that the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the rest of the Government would like to be remembered as the people who took on rising inflation and pushed it down, but there are two big blemishes in their record. First, they brought the inflation in the first place. Secondly, the very same policies that they used to squeeze demand and inflation are also the policies that are crushing firms, industries and jobs. If the Government want to claim credit for combating inflation, they must also take the blame for causing the slump. No one else deserves the blame.

The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said two weeks ago:

"After 12 years in office there are no Conservative alibis".

That is certainly true, but it is also true that, if the Government were to have more time in power, they would continue to do the same thing. They would eventually float the economy out of a slump simply by relying on a rise in credit-financed consumption, and would try to tackle the resulting inflationary pressures in the economy with high interest rates. They have no other policies for a recovery, as they have shown before. That would push up prices, debts and wage claims, push down investment and output and wipe out industrial capacity, yet again. They have done that not just once in the past decade, but twice. They have not changed their policies, and they have still not learnt.

Last night I watched the "Panorama" programme—I suspect that many other hon. Members also watched it—on the slump and the way in which it is spreading. I saw the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry say that he was certain that

"industry is poised to respond to a growth in demand".

How can he say that? It did not happen last time. When the Government's policies wiped out 20 per cent. of Britain's manufacturing capacity in the early 1980s and then let credit rip in the mid-1980s, British industry could not respond to the rise in demand. The result was, as the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should understand, that Britain had its first ever deficit in manufactured trade, a huge balance of trade deficit and then, of course, a gigantic balance of payments deficit—so big that it remains at the figure that the Chancellor gave us this afternoon, despite two years of pressing deflationary policy. We still have a balance of payments deficit that would have been utterly unacceptable in any previous period—although in previous periods our economy never had the benefit of North sea oil and self-sufficiency.

Yet again today the Chancellor did nothing to stop history repeating itself as tragedy. There is no strategy to this Budget—merely expediency. There is no effort in this Budget—or in any other of the Government's policies—to help to create an environment in which productive industry can thrive and become more competitive.

There was no sign—not so much as a hint—of any significant policy for promoting industrial investment in research and development and technology transfer. The best that we got was a way—a welcome way—of trying to help companies that have hit particular difficulties as a result of the Government's policies. There was no commitment to—and certainly no practical means were proposed for—maintaining macro-economic stability. In 12 years the Government have never managed to achieve the sustained low interest rates that are essential to that. The only way in which they have ever got inflation down is by throttling the economy with high interest rates—the opposite of stability.

In 12 years, the other critical ingredients of competitiveness and of combating inflation—sustained improvements in the transport system, training and education—have never been afforded the necessary priority by the Government. They were certainly given scant attention today. It appears that education—the cause of great anxiety among parents, the public and industry—is now made into a poll tax plaything, and the cuts go on. Let me give an example. Last week, 17 Conservative-controlled local education authorities announced £54 million-worth of additional cuts in education—the only reason being that they wanted to try to stay within the limits set down by the Government, who are supposed to have education close to their heart.

Now, if the Government have their way, education is to be balkanised into a tangle of opted-out schools and underfunded colleges as the chaotic experiments of the 1980s are extended into the 1990s. Now we know what the Prime Minister really meant when he told *The Times* a few weeks ago that, although education was "closest to his heart", his thoughts were not yet "fully worked up".

"I approach this issue,"

said the right hon. Gentleman,

"with an instinct that something needs to be done and we are trying to determine exactly what it is."

[Mr. Neil Kinnock]

While the Prime Minister is "trying to determine" exactly what he wants for education—while the Prime Minister is dithering—millions of other British people with children approaching school age and of school and college age are worrying. Industrialists and potential employers are urging a new scale of provision and performance and investment in education. All are looking at our neighbours who are making the proper investment in education and training so that their people reap the rewards of new skills and their economies reap the rewards of extra strength and competitiveness.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster seems to think this funny. He is going to have to explain how it is that, after 12 years of Tory Government, Britain still has skill shortages in the middle of a deep slump. He will have to explain why numerous industrialists and employers—people who are his political allies—hotly condemn the Government's absolutely miserable record over all these years. From this Government and in this Budget, we get no commitment comparable to that made in our neighbouring competitive countries. There never will be that commitment.

In 12 years of power, with £100 billion-worth of oil revenues, £62 billion-worth of assets sales and the highest tax burden in British history, the Government have never made the necessary investment. Just last week, we heard the Prime Minister say:

"We have been going in a particular direction for 12 years and we shall continue to go in that direction".

I suppose that that was intended to reassure the Finchley matriarch and her remaining followers. The Prime Minister's words are a warning to all those who, during these 12 years, have been engulfed by spreading poverty. It is a warning to the victims—those who have had security and success snatched from them by unemployment, high interest rates, business failure and high mortgage rates. It is the victims of industrial decline, and decay in the essential community and welfare services, who should be warned. The Prime Minister's words are a warning that the Government, who are

"going in the same direction"

as they have been for the past 12 years, will take Britain and the British people further behind.

In the depth of recession, we needed a Budget to build out of recession. We needed a Budget that helped to lay foundations for future economic strength. Instead, we got a Budget from a Government who will not learn from their own failures and—even worse—will not learn from the success of others. The British people know that that is true. They know, too, that this Government ruled over the wasted decade of the 1980s. When the Government call the general election and give them the chance, the British people will stop them wasting the 1990s.

5.16 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The Leader of the Opposition has an enviable record as a Welsh rugby union coach, but as I watched him at the Dispatch Box this afternoon it was more in the discipline of cricket that I judged him. He resembled nothing so much as the batsman who had found that the wicket had turned overnight. He has discovered—and it is much to his distress—that the Conservative party does not intend to limp across the election battlefield with the ball and chain of the community charge. To the right hon. Gentleman's discomfort, the Conservative party has taken a radical way out of the dilemma and met the challenge.

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): We have shot his fox.

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that the Leader of the Opposition has ever been on a horse in his life—and if he has been on a horse, he has certainly never been hunting, so we can now return to the more relevant analogy afforded by the cricket field to describe the proposals for changes in the financing of local government.

The right hon. Gentleman showed his irritation because the debate has shown the striking reality that so much of local government is conducted at the behest and under the control of central Government. From my study of the life of Aneurin Bevan I have always judged that to be the case. It was Aneurin Bevan who told the story of his pilgrimage from the meanest local authority in Monmouthshire up to Westminster—always looking to discover where the reality of power lay. I say that for the benefit of Welsh Labour Members, who know in their hearts that it is true.

What has been adduced today is an attempt to bring about a better balance between the forces of finance and authority. Anyone who has any doubts about where authority has always sought to be in this matter need only think of Shirley Williams who, as Secretary of State for Education and Science, tried to require universal comprehensive education throughout England and Wales. That is an indication of the underlying realities.

The Chancellor's remarks about the future financing of local authorities will form the basis of a very relevant debate, and I believe that the balance of judgment will conclude that wise decisions have been made. Given the way in which the judgment has been presented, one could suppose that it involves a hypothecated increase in value added tax for the replacement of the community charge or part thereof. Of course, that cannot be so—it is merely the point at which the debate opens. We are talking about the use of the wider resources of central Government taxation for the financing of local authorities, not about any particular aspect of central Government taxation.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Why did the right hon. Gentleman serve in a Government who reduced the percentage of money provided for local government by central Government?

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to answer that question at once. It was——

Mr. George Foulker (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): A mistake.

Mr. Biffen: Yes, it was a mistake. I am prepared to appear before any audience with the hon. Gentleman: I will plead my mistakes and he will plead his certainty, and I know who will get the vote.

The issue of the public sector borrowing requirement has returned to our Budget debate after an absence of some time. I feel no joy at it once again being part of the Budget debate, but I accept that, with the general state of the economic cycle, it is reasonable to budget for a certain amount of borrowing. That also places a restraint on our rhetoric about and our objectives for income tax. From now on income tax, with other central Government taxation, will have to bear its responsibility in the financing of local government. That does not mean that we

cannot have as our objective an income tax rate of 20p in the pound, but it will be a considerably more difficult objective to secure, and our rhetoric must adjust to that.

I wish to touch on just two or three points because many other hon. Members wish to take the great debate forward. I do not pretend that there is a great theme running through my speech. I cannot deny my initial appreciation that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) should be so discomforted about the replacement of the community charge.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor rightly laid great emphasis on the need for a business revival. I declare an interest, and my business interests are listed in the Register of Members' Interests. I hope that when the Finance Bill goes into Committee, some thought will be given to the current levels of investment allowances. I did not hear that matter feature in my right hon. Friend's speech, but I hope that it is not out of his mind.

I do not think that any hon. Member expected interest rates to feature in my right hon. Friend's statement. I can remember Budgets, even from this Government, which concealed interest rate changes. I see the author of one—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)—sitting not so far from me. There have been other diversions this afternoon, but continuing and substantial reductions in interest rates would be most advantageous of all to the business community.

It is obvious that we are under the shadow of a general election. We should not be too sensitive about that—it is expected that we should so react. I have noted a certain reticence by Opposition spokesmen. I do not say that the Labour party has a hidden agenda, but there are certain aspects of the development of economic policy that it would prefer to elaborate beyond the electoral chasm——

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): What are they?

Mr. Biffen: It is a process of education—a sharing of knowledge with the hon. Gentleman. I have a document——

Mr. Kinnock: It is the 1979 manifesto.

Mr. Biffen: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is much better than that. It comes from the Institute for Public and Policy Research—a recently furbished intellectual hothouse that is part of the redesigning of the Labour party to make it fit for alliance with the Liberal Democrats. It is presided over by Lady Blackstone and Lord Donoughue, the aristocrats of Labour. They have commissioned a Mr. John Grieve-Smith who worked in the economic section of the Cabinet Office and the Treasury—what a lineage.

With that background, the document has been presented by that body, which moves so closely with the Leader of the Opposition and his Front Bench——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): No, it does not.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman should not deny it—that would upset Lord Donoughue's day.

The Times said:

"A report by the Institute for Public and Policy Research says that . . . Britain's entry into the exchange rate mechanism has made the case for a co-ordinated pay strategy even more urgent . . . Mr. Grieve-Smith says that the government must reach agreement on pay policy with the CBI and the TUC not as a short-term expedient but as part of a long-term strategy for economic management."

Well, there are none like the old ones. Those of us who recollect the 1960s and 1970s will feel a certain nostalgia about that.

I hope that I am giving a little good-natured guidance to the Leader of the Opposition. I promise him that I will be a better friend to him than most of those who sit around and about him. I want to know why those distinguished academics were scooped out of the Treasury and put under the wing of Lady Blackstone. The process is intellectual beyond belief. It is dotty. They want the TUC to carry out an incomes policy backed by Government statute. Yet only 38 per cent. of employees belong to trade unions. There has been a remarkable fall of about 25 per cent. in the unionised work force since 1979. The very forces which could not deliver in the 1960s and 1970s are being invoked now by the intelligentsia who flank the Leader of the Opposition. This time, they offer the prospect of success from an even more rickety machine.

I tell the Leader of the Opposition that that is not part of the hidden agenda—it will be part of the open debate at the coming election. There will be a growing interest, especially among the Liberal Democrats, to know where the right hon. Gentleman stands on these issues. He has had a comparatively easy time with endless good-natured discourse across all the affairs of the nation and the world without ever having to reveal very much. I must tell him that his salad days are over. We are approaching an election and a debate, and I look forward to that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. A large number of hon. Members who have sat through the debate so far want to take part. Brief speeches would be appreciated.

5.27 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) was right to draw the attention of the House to the fact that 3,000 jobs are being lost and 100 businesses being liquidated every day. That contrasts with the Chancellor's speech, which lasted one and a quarter hours, but did not once use the word "unemployment". The right hon. Gentleman said that his Budget was intended to assist business to recover from the recession in the short term and to invest in the long term. The Government have had 12 years to provide such a Budget, but they have not done so, and they did not do so today.

We hear a great deal from the Tory party about recessions being due to economic cycles. We know all about the cycles of the Tory party. We can go back to Anthony Eden in 1957, who introduced a Budget in the April that reduced income tax by half a crown, and another in the autumn, after an election, that increased it. We can go back to the great dash for growth by Anthony Barber in the early 1970s, which gave us the inflation that Labour inherited in 1974.

The Chancellor heaped great praise on his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). He talked of economic miracles. He was proud of the fact that there were economic miracles. At the Dispatch Box, he read press cuttings from Germany, the United States and Japan showing how Britain was having an economic miracle. Today, we have had some of the truth from the new

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Chancellor of the Exchequer who said that he did not believe in miracles. It has taken us 12 years to get such an admission.

The Chancellor said that inflation would be down to about 4 per cent. in the autumn, and no doubt there is a plan to bring interest rates down as well so that by the autumn they are about 10 per cent. We see how the Government and the Chancellor have lost control of the economy, to such an extent that the Chancellor was unable today to announce a reduction in interest rates. We will have to wait until tomorrow in this three-instalment plan—the Budget today, a cut in interest rates tomorrow and the abolition of the poll tax on Thursday. It is not surprising that the Prime Minister is tired. I have every sympathy with him. To have to preside over such a week must be trying for him.

We know all about the cycles of this Government. The first cycle from 1979-81 gave us inflation of 21·9 per cent. We have been here before. In 1981-83, unemployment was 3 million. Again, we have been here before. We see the simple equation between high interest rates, lowering inflation and unemployment. Again, the unemployed are taking the full strain. Only recently, Barclays bank announced 4,000 lay-offs countrywide, and the Midland bank announced 5,000 lay-offs during the year. Years ago, joining the bank meant a job for life. That is no longer the case. One of the consequences of the past 12 years of Thatcherism has been the end of the security of a job for life in the service industry, just as happened in the early days in manufacturing industry.

Those of us who try to speak early in the Budget debate each year have argued all along that the consequences of a single club policy would be high interest rates. We said that jobs would be destroyed, and jobs have been destroyed. We said that firms would be destroyed, and firms have been destroyed. We said that tax receipts would be reduced, and we have seen that again in today's Budget. We said that social security payments would be increased, and we have seen that again in today's Budget.

It is hardly surprising that falling receipts and rising social security payments mean that the public sector surplus, of which the Government were so proud for so long, is now on the increase, and we have a PSBR of £8 billion. The Chancellor did not tell us from the Dispatch Box what the PSBR was forecast to be in the year ahead. No doubt that again is a consequence of the fact that we shall have to wait until Thursday to discover the true consequences of the abolition of the poll tax.

Opposition Members have consistently said that squeezing inflation out of the economy cannot be the only goal of an economic policy. There has been no industrial strategy, no training strategy and no planning for the future. All we have had is the encouragement of a never-never land of gearing and credit which reminds me of Oscar Wilde who, when he died in Paris, said that he was dying as he had lived—beyond his means.

The British consumer has, for the past 12 years under the Tory Government, been living beyond his means, encouraged by a Government who do not believe in planning, in intervention or in steering the economy towards manufacturing. On the one hand, they said that the citizen must cut excess borrowing and spending, but on the other they encouraged him to borrow more and to spend more, to live for today as if there were no tomorrow. Such a policy can clearly be described as short-termism.

The medium-term financial strategy, the Government's great strength in the early years, their great policy on which everything was based, gave us short-termism. We have heard nothing today about soft landings. We have had a variety of definitions of a recession. One was that a recession occurs when economic growth falls for two quarters in succession. Dr. John Bridge, chief executive of the Northern Development company, has described it as negative growth. I prefer the more mundane and earthly description of a former President of the United States, President Truman, who said:

"It's a recession when the man next door loses his job. It's a slump when you lose yours."

There is no prospect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of you losing your job, but we can see clearly where the Government have taken us.

Between 1979 and 1981, Teesside lost so many jobs that the unemployed could have filled Ayresome Park football stadium twice over. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, the recession is in the south and in the midlands, but it is creeping into the north. We have seen that over the past few weeks. British Steel has told the public on Teesside that it will be shedding 360 jobs in the next financial year. The unions claim that the figure is more likely to be between 500 and 600. Smaller firms are going into liquidation—50 jobs here and another 50 jobs there.

The Chancellor said today that the car industry was growing in strength, but Minories is closing a garage with a loss of 25 jobs. Even ICI, the great provider of work in our area, is introducing local working arrangements which will reduce jobs. This is a recession by 1,000 cuts.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The hon. Gentleman likes to give the downside on Teesside, but perhaps he would like to give the upbeat side with the number of new jobs that have been provided by MTM, a growing and expanding chemical company. Our local chamber of commerce has said that the real problem is that we will not have enough skilled people in future rather than a shortage now. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has unemployment problems in his constituency, but my constituency has not, and that is in Teesside as well.

Mr. Bell: I anticipated the hon. Gentleman's question, and I have the unemployment statistics for his constituency of Langbaurgh, where 4,532 people, or 6 per cent. of the work force, are out of work. In Stockton, South, another constituency close to mine, 4,507 people, or 10 per cent. of the work force, are out of work. The hon. Gentleman might soon have to address the question of those 4,532 people who are out of work. When he says that there is a shortage of skills, he must ask who, after 12 years of a Tory Government, is responsible for that. I shall be glad to give him the Labour party's programme, worked out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), which shows clearly the Labour party's training policy so that those skills will be provided in future.

The Chancellor mentioned some benefit to football last season and some new scheme for sport in his Budget today. He reminded me somewhat of the super-sub who had been brought on to the field with only 10 minutes to go, whose aim was to score the spectacular goal. There he

was, hovering on the touchline. There he was down by the corner flag. There he was afraid to be caught offside. There he was running away from the ball—anywhere but where the action was.

This is the Chancellor's first Budget but it may well be his last. We have had a one-club policy, and it may be that we shall have a one-term Chancellor. He was timid and unimaginative. He did not produce a Budget for jobs or for people. He has lost control of the economy. As I said, he could not even tell us whether interest rates would be reduced tomorrow. He will be relieved of his job as soon as the referee blows the whistle and ends the game, when we have a general election. Then, and only then, will he and the rest of his team be put out of their misery.

5.39 pm

Mr. David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): In the Budget debate last year I followed the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and it is my good fortune to do so again today. The factual bases of the hon. Gentleman's speeches are usually accurate, but I detected two inaccuracies today. First, he said that the Chancellor did not refer to unemployment, when he did. Secondly, he suggested that R. A. Butler had reduced income tax by 2s 6d in the pound in 1955; in fact, it was only 6d, which is a fifth of 2s 6d. We tend to forget those values now that we are on a different system.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his Budget—the first, I hope, of many. His two predecessors set high standards with their Budget speeches which were well constructed, to the point and commendably brief, and my right hon. Friend maintained those standards.

At this stage in a Parliament it is inevitable that the Budget will be judged on its likely electoral consequences rather than on its economic consequences. My right hon. Friend got it right on both scores. It is an extraordinarily good Budget.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) about the increased proportion of local government expenditure which is to be met in future by central Government. That is long overdue. Taxes raised locally have been contributing far too much to local government revenue for too long, because most of the real decisions about local government expenditure are taken in the House rather than locally.

The reduction of £140 in the poll tax—I call it the poll tax although I appreciate that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have to use the term "community charge"—will be very welcome in my constituency, as it will be throughout the country.

It is unpleasant that VAT will have to go up by 2·5 per cent. to finance the reduction in the poll tax. The Labour party has been criticising the Government for some time because too much local government expenditure has been met locally. If it is to be met centrally, the consequence is that it has to be paid for, either by increasing taxation or by reducing expenditure on other things. The Opposition outburst when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT suggested to me that they were dodging the task of facing the real issues and the hard decisions that have to be taken by any Government.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East) rose—

Mr. Knox: I am not giving way—Mr. Deputy Speaker asked us to be brief.

I welcome the changes announced concerning child benefit. The initial changes are small but, most important, the Chancellor intimated that child benefit will be index-linked to inflation from next year. Some of us have been very concerned about child benefit for some time. We are delighted that in future we shall not have to rebel against the Government to show our opposition to their failure to uprate it.

I also welcome the changes in company taxation. We need only consider the state of industry to realise the necessity for a better cash flow if much of industry is to survive. Therefore, it is particularly important that the Chancellor should have proposed changes in corporation tax, an increase in the VAT threshold and the other measures. Those should be helpful in strengthening our industrial base.

On the general state of the economy, a year ago the main economic problems facing the country were inflation and the balance of payments. Now the problem that looms above all others is the recession, although the balance of payments is still a cause for concern. As a result of Government policies over the past couple of years, inflation has been largely brought under control. It has fallen in recent months and it is likely to fall to about 4 per cent. by the end of the year, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor pointed out.

Unfortunately, the policies of high interest rates and tight credit that have been so successful in curbing inflation are the same policies that have forced us into recession. Output is falling, profits are falling, investment is falling and, alas, unemployment is rising. That is not a happy position, and action must be taken to reverse those trends. There is urgency about it because of the time lag between taking action and the action becoming effective.

The economy desperately needs the stimulation to growth which only lower interest rates can bring. I welcome the action that the Chancellor has already taken in that respect. I urge him to continue the process over coming months. Lower interest rates are essential if we are to avoid a more serious recession than that of 1980-82 when the manufacturing sector was particularly hard hit; already there are signs that it is being badly affected again.

I often wonder if the importance of manufacturing industry is fully appreciated. Obviously, it has to try to meet the domestic demand for manufactured goods and to keep imports to a minimum, but it is also important in relation to our export performance. Government figures show that, whereas about 80 per cent. of manufactured output is internationally tradeable, only about 20 per cent. of the service sector is, so if we are to have a healthy international payments position we must have a strong competitive manufacturing sector.

Alas, the recent history of manufacturing gives little cause for comfort. Between December 1973 and December 1990—a period of 17 years—output in manufacturing industry rose by only 3·5 per cent. The House will note that that period covers the terms of office of the last Labour Government and of the present Conservative Government. There is, therefore, no party political capital to be made from that poor performance.

It is worth recalling that the increase of about 3·5 per cent. in manufacturing output in the last 17 years compares with an increase of about 70 per cent. in the

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previous 17 years. Of course, that sorry tale is not just the fault of the Government. The conduct of management and of trade unions has left a great deal to be desired.

The Government can and must contribute to the strength of the manufacturing sector, particularly by improving the economic environment in which it operates. In that respect, as I mentioned earlier, lower interest rates are essential for three main reasons. First, they would help to increase demand for goods produced by manufacturing industry. Secondly, they would encourage higher investment in new plant and machinery, which would improve efficiency and increase capacity. Thirdly, they would ensure that the owners of capital received a higher return from investment in manufacturing industry than from fixed-interest securities.

I mentioned earlier that we still have a balance of payments problem, although it is less serious than it was a year ago. It is pleasing to note that the figures for 1990 showed that the deficit had declined by a third compared with the previous year. But we must remember that economic growth has been held back in the past year. When that happens, the balance of payments tends to improve. The great worry is that when the economy starts to expand again, the deficit will increase once more. When we consider that we have been in deficit to a fairly substantial extent over the last four years, the worry is that we shall face very large deficits again in a year or two.

The only conclusion to be drawn is that there is something fundamentally wrong with the exchange rate of sterling and that an adjustment is needed. We are now in the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. Membership of the ERM is important and stable exchange rates are important for the manufacturing sector in particular. I believe in the disciplinary effect on inflation of British membership of the ERM, and I have no desire to undermine our membership, but it would be strange if we had got the value of sterling right when we joined—indeed, it seems that we did not. I believe an early adjustment should be made, but it should be made clear that it is a one-off adjustment, so that we in no way undermine the disciplinary effects of membership of the exchange rate mechanism. It should be made clear to foreigners, and to those who are worried about confidence in sterling, that it is a one-off move and that we strongly believe in the discipline of the ERM.

I believe that it is very important that we should be in the exchange rate mechanism, but at the correct level for sterling, because in that way the current account of our balance of payments can be in balance over the years. It also provides price stability to importers and exporters and anti-inflationary discipline. Moreover, if we adjusted the value of sterling within the mechanism on a one-off basis it would be possible to lower interest rates because it would not be necessary to keep them at their present high level to maintain the present value of sterling.

5.50 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The House has listened to what will probably be viewed as the first social market budget. I wish that it had been produced by a Social Democrat Chancellor, but since the Conservative party seems to be joining the Christian Democrats, perhaps we may agree that we are now witnessing social market economics in this country.

The social priorities spelled out in the Budget are welcome and totally new for this Government. They have not been demonstrated for eleven and a half years. For example, the emphasis upon mortgage tax relief being confined to the standard rate taxpayer is thoroughly welcome and socially correct.

The decision to increase child benefit by 12 per cent.—after its real value has fallen during the past eleven and a half years—although modest, is extremely welcome and seems to mark a major shift in social priorities because the Chancellor accompanied it with a commitment that child benefit would go up in line with inflation in future, as with all other basic benefits. We welcome that strongly.

The third social element in the Budget which is extremely important is the 15 per cent. increase on cigarettes, which are a killer drug and have been treated with kid gloves for far too long by this Government. That is the right social priority, as was the courageous decision to increase petrol by 15 per cent. because, in social terms, cars are an expensive element in the transport infrastructure.

I would not welcome those social changes were they not also accompanied by some worthwhile changes on the supply side of the economy, aimed at improving efficiency and competitiveness of the market economy, which is necessary for a social market to operate effectively, as one cannot finance some of the social concerns unless the market is operating efficiently.

That leads me to the crucial test of the Budget—has the Chancellor played fast and loose with inflation and with consumer spending? I acquit him of the charge of doing so. People will say that this is an election Budget, and the decks are certainly cleared for an election in June, October or next year, but given the circumstances, it is not an electoral-bribing budget. It is not as irresponsible as some of the Budgets that the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) triggered off, particularly before the 1987 election, which caused a flagrant consumer boom. However, the Budget will have its electoral payback, because I would not be surprised if the international market were not prepared for a substantial cut now in interest rates. That is also the core priority.

By emphasising business, the Chancellor has chosen the right medium-term priority. My only anxiety is that by relaxing corporation tax and reducing it—although in many ways that is welcome, especially as it will give extra liquidity to companies that are being severely squeezed, which will get worse in the next few months—the corporate sector will act as it has so often done before when there has been a little relaxation, and will take the pressure off the wages front.

I only hope that it does not do so, because the one fundamental that must come from the squeeze is a permanent reduction in our tendency to pay ourselves more than we earn. If we are to stay within the exchange rate mechanism—especially at present exchange rates—unit costs have to be reduced, and our competitiveness has to improve. That means wage increases at a level of 4 or 5 per cent. That is why I also welcome the incentives for more profit-related pay, which also has a social market connotation. That is also why I welcome the principle of shares for all employees and the carrot to introduce that. I welcome the Chancellor's implicit statement that he

would not hesitate to use the stick to introduce that—and he may well have to carry that out. It has been scandalous that top executives have given themselves share options at attractive rates but have not provided similar options throughout the firm. Again, that is another welcome switch towards the social market economy.

The fundamental requirement is to be bold over interest rates. If I was Chancellor, I would give the world a little time to absorb this Budget. Because of the changes in local government financing, it is more complex than it appears at first sight, but when the world has absorbed it, people will realise that the Chancellor has not taken risks with the economy, and he will be fully justified in taking 1 per cent. off interest rates now and a further 1 per cent.—perhaps in two tranches of 0·5 per cent—during the next few weeks. If there are risks to be taken on the back of this Budget, it is urgent that that should be done by cutting interest rates quickly. For a variety of reasons, it was not easy to reduce interest rates in the late autumn last year and in the early part of this year, although the situation demanded and necessitated it. Now the room has been found for a substantial cut.

As regards the ingenious—in my view, wholly correct—massive shift in local government finance, people who think that this is a boring Budget have not yet realised the full impact of that shift. The Budget will transform local government finance and it is high time that that happened. The crucial decision by the Chancellor—which any Chancellor would make given the total mess that local government finance is in—was to raise compensating revenue by a mechanism that he knows will deliver it, by raising value added tax by 2·5 per cent. That was the right way to claw back that money.

In my judgment, increasing VAT was right in any case, as our VAT rate has been well below the average in the European Community. Although it is not necessary that everyone has exactly the same VAT rate for the proper functioning of a European common internal market, it is a distortion if there are marked discrepancies. Therefore, it was logical and inevitable that we would raise our VAT rates. Doing so at this time, with inflation decreasing fast for other reasons, is wise. It has the added advantage that the poll tax fed through to the retail prices index in a dramatic fashion, and the Chancellor has assured us that the increase in VAT will be covered by the cuts in poll tax.

The next logical step, which I imagine will be announced in the next few days, is to take three elements out of local government finances. The first two are the fire service and the police, both of which are carefully monitored and are effectively agency-run by local government at the moment, with the Home Office operating strict manpower controls, and also inspectorates. The third element has to be education. That has already been advocated by the Social Democrat party to the Secretary of State for the Environment's present review. Increasingly, SDP policy seems to be followed by the Government with a rapidity exceeding that of the Labour party.

If education comes out of local government spending—as is right—it will not be as much of a centralising measure as some people imagine, because of the greater degree of self-management in schools. It is also extremely important that that change is accompanied by a considerable strengthening of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools. Also, a greater measure of independence, radicalism and toughness on education policy will have to be brought into the inspectorate. I hope that the inspectorate will not continue as a mutual support agency for the Department of Education and Science. If it had a measure of outside independence, such as through the Audit Commission, it would be greatly improved.

Such a change would alter the whole structure of local government. It is logical that there should be single-tier authorities, but they should be flexible. They do not automatically have to be the same—the units of local government vary in different parts of the United Kingdom, with considerable benefit. That would lead to the question of how to raise the money. We and the Liberal Democrats would prefer a local income tax as the way of raising the revenue for the smaller number of local government services.

I believe that as far as possible local government should raise the revenue for the services that it provides with the exception of the needs element, with the extra provided by central Government to compensate for areas of low pay, where people cannot raise all the revenue themselves.

I should prefer a local income tax, but it seems that there will be a property tax. I urge the Front Benches of the Labour and Conservative parties to get together, at least informally, to introduce a property tax that they could both support. After the fiasco of the poll tax, a new property tax should not be introduced which would be subject to massive change.

Before people think about that with mock horror, they should remember that there was a moment when the Government were about to change the state earnings-related pension scheme. However, they drew back from that idea—prudently, in my view. There are a few matters which must stick across the political divide and which must not be subject to massive change before a general election. State pensions is one such matter, and the basic structure of tax is another.

It is no good the Government introducing a new property tax that is not supported. Therefore, although the Conservatives may want the element of head tax to be built into the property tax, because it means that they should not have to eat so many of their words on the poll tax, I beg the Government not to introduce it. It is clear that the Labour party will not support it, and neither shall we. Not many people believe that it would be a sensible way of introducing a property tax.

The Government should opt for the pure property tax without the add-on factor, which is merely a face-saving device. It will not lose them much, as they have had to eat nearly every word about the poll tax. They will not be able to recoup everything by this extra add-on. Definite benefits will accrue to a political party that admits that it has made a complete foul-up and has changed its policy.

I say that without any particular interest. I and my party attacked the poll tax from the moment it was introduced. It was the wrong tax. It was unfair, and it was an administrative nightmare. It seems that it will fall because of its administrative costs and because of the inability to collect it rather than because of any other factor. However, it also deserved to fall because of its unfairness.

The Budget matches the difficult and strained circumstances. Nobody can be certain that we shall come out of this recession in the rather optimistic time scale mentioned by the Chancellor. Much will depend on the international economy, for which the signs are reasonably optimistic. There seems to be an upturn in the United

[Dr. David Owen]

States economy, but there is considerable concern about the Federal Republic of Germany. The costs of bringing the east German economy into balance with that of the Federal Republic are considerable.

It is necessary to live within the disciplines of the exchange rate mechanism. That is why I believe that any talk of using a realignment of currencies as a way of devaluing would be a major mistake. Therefore, I do not quite share the views of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). I believe that the exchange rate mechanism is a flexible mechanism which allows member countries to change their exchange rate if they get out of kilter with the rest of their economic management.

That is why I still retain a considerable scepticism about a fixed exchange rate system that is a single currency. I wish that we would stop using the term "single currency", because people equate it with a common currency. For the European Community, a common currency is a thoroughly desirable development, but a fixed exchange rate system in the European Community is open to serious objection. It would be rare for the 12 members of the Community to be able to live within a fixed exchange rate system and to accept that draconian discipline. Bretton Woods was never a fixed exchange rate system. One had the freedom to choose to devalue, even if with considerable difficulty.

I do not want it to be easy to change the exchange rate system. An exchange rate system that is too flexible allows politicians to escape some of the necessary internal disciplines. The ERM is an effective and rather subtle discipline within which we can live. There will come a time when we should opt for the narrow band. At the moment, the odds are against that because, if we did, there would be a tendency to revalue upwards, or at least the risk of doing so. The pound is not so competitive that we can afford to disadvantage ourselves further at this stage. I should go for the narrow band, but not quite yet.

There are considerable uncertainties elsewhere in the Budget, but the Chancellor has made some worthwhile judgments, not least in freezing the married tax allowance to give him greater freedom in future reform. My main objection is that he has not been generous enough with child benefit. To catch up the 12 per cent. deficit, it will be necessary—next year and the year after—not just to inflation-proof child benefit, but to increase it.

All the statistics still show that poverty is confined mostly to families which have many children under the age of 16. We need to do more for them, because, even though value added tax—because of its zero rating of many key items—is not as regressive as the Leader of the Opposition tried to make out, nor is it a progressive tax, we need contervailing balances, one of which would be a generous child benefit system.

6.6 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I find myself in the pleasant position of agreeing broadly with nearly all that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said. I am pleased that the SDP embraces some of the ideas that I recommended a quarter of a century ago, but I shall refer to that later.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) quote Oscar Wilde. I was reminded that, as Oscar Wilde was dying in Paris, the last thing he did was turn and look at the wallpaper in his dingy hotel and say, "One of us has got to go". That is probably the Government's attitude—one can relate Oscar Wilde to the community charge, and the wallpaper to the Government. I think that the wallpaper—the Government—will survive without the community charge.

Since I entered the House many years ago, I have been a strong advocate of three main issues—small firms, wider share ownership and the need to switch from direct to indirect taxation. Therefore, I can safely say that I am as pleased with this Budget as I was with last year's.

I shall deal first with small firms. There is no doubt that they have suffered probably more than the rest of industry, because they have been less able to bear the difficulties of the recession. Therefore, I welcome the concessions made on corporation tax and on the collection of bad debts.

I should like to draw attention to one point in particular. I have lost count of the number of times that I have leapt up when Treasury Ministers were answering questions and asked whether they would please do something to raise the level at which VAT is imposed on small firms. It was far too low. It was ludicrous that somebody whose earnings were just within the £20,000 rate and who was struggling to get work should have to go through all the pantomime and suffer the rigours of the draconian Customs and Excise. I can say with absolute delight that the Chancellor has done the right thing. It will be welcomed not only by me, but by many small and growing firms.

I referred earlier to wider share ownership. With that as with small firms, when I was an enthusiast 100 years ago, no one was interested. The Government were not especially interested, and the Opposition did not want to know. Small firms and wider share ownership are now fashionable, and I am delighted. There is more joy in heaven . . .

With the late Maurice Macmillan and others, I was a founder member of the wider share ownership movement before I came to the House. We strongly advocated employee share schemes and we produced many schemes. As the right hon. Member for Devonport emphasised, the schemes were not intended to be only for top cosseted directors and high executives of large public companies. We intended the idea to spread down to the work force, and our dream was that the man who worked on the factory floor would, instead of reading the *Daily Mirror* or a comic, ask for the *Financial Times*.

We have not quite reached that stage, but the Chancellor has taken a step in the right direction. Share ownership will spread. As with the spread of ownership of property, the spread of ownership of shares is a bulwark against dictatorship and the intruding powers of the state.

We also advocated that there should be an easier system through which people could acquire shares. Nobody is more fond of the stock exchange and of stockbrokers than I am. They are a marvellous professional body, but they are not and never have been geared to the needs of the very small investor. Such investors cannot afford stockbrokers, because they are too expensive. Other methods had to be found. The unit trust movement and, to an extent, investment trusts were a start in that direction. We advocated what I believe to be necessary—that we should enable people to buy shares over the counter in high street

shops. The Chancellor must have looked at some of our ideas of 25 years ago. We are delighted that he has taken them on board after all this time.

I warn my right hon. Friend that strong pressure will have to be brought to bear. The stock exchange and financial institutions are not geared to our ideas. If the Chancellor and his team can show determination that there should be an opportunity for people to go into shops —not necessarily Woolworth—and banks in the high street to acquire small blocks of shares, there will be a dramatic spread of share ownership. I welcome the measures that my right hon. Friend has proposed.

I am sorry to keep saying, "I told you so," but I have been in the House for quite a long time, and it is 25 years since I first recommended that teachers' salaries should be a charge on the Exchequer. I did so because teachers' salaries are negotiated nationally. They are the biggest item of local authority education expenditure, and by statute since 1944, the Secretary of State for Education and Science has had a duty to maintain a supply of teachers. That was never taken seriously. It was frowned upon by bureaucrats and other Pooh-Bahs in county councils and education authorities, so nothing was done. We do not know yet, but such a change may be announced on Wednesday or Thursday.

I agree strongly with the right hon. Member for Devonport that one should not give the impression that the necessary switch from local to national finance can be carried out painlessly. There is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as free education, free health, free police or free fire services. It all has to be paid for. I am glad that those services are being paid for by an increase in VAT.

The Government came to office determined that there should be a switch from direct to indirect taxation. We advocated that switch because direct tax—income tax—is a tax on work, which everyone has to do, on effort and on initiative. Indirect taxation, whether VAT or the old purchase tax, is a tax on spending. If people desire to be thrifty and to control their own spending, indirect taxation is the right choice. A shift has been necessary, and the Budget contains a further shift, which is right.

We are in recession. I have said several times in the House how much I hate the interest rate policy. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor, heard me pontificating on the subject. He always responded courteously and thoughtfully, although he did not always agree with me. I hate high interest rates, because they afflict the people who are least able to bear them. They benefit the haves, but they severely hurt the have-nots.

There are two sectors in the have-nots. Small firms have to borrow. No firm ever developed unless it borrowed, and one cannot get an industry going without borrowing. That is why I disagree so strongly with the sanctimonious puritans who hint that borrowing is wicked. Of course it is not. The same is true of home owners. How many people ever bought a house without borrowing? Only a handful of rich people could do that. Most home owners and most small firms have to borrow money, so I reject the puritanism that says that borrowing is wrong. People who have to borrow have been the most heavily hit.

All Governments—and perhaps Conservative Governments more than others—suffer from a disease that I call accountantitis. The disease operates as follows. If a firm overstretches itself, accountants are called in. The accountant sorts out the books and says, "I have cleared everything. There is nought on both sides of the ledger." Suddenly, no one is making shoes, ships or boots. A country can suffer from the same danger if the clamps are put on too ferociously.

As I interpret the Budget, in macro-economic terms, it is intended in the recession to get Britain and British industry on the move again. It is a Budget for business, and that is why it has my wholehearted support. Provided that it is accompanied by a steady reduction in interest rates, there will be a steady reduction in inflation. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's forecast last year that there would be a steady trend downwards of inflation which would lead to a steady trend downwards of interest rates will come true. If the Budget, which is a step in the right direction, is later accompanied by a steady reduction in interest rates, the confidence so necessary if our country is to thrive in the 1990s, and which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wants so much, will be achieved.

6.17 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I wish that I could agree with the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir. A. Grant). I wish that it was a Budget for manufacturing industry and for industry as a whole. I am afraid that the Budget will go down in history as the poll tax Budget. Given the great hardship caused to millions by the poll tax, given the Prime Minister's and the Chancellor's support for it, and given the fact that the Prime Minister now says that the tax is uncollectable, it would have been nice to see proposals for reparations for the victims of that tax in the Budget. However, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will no doubt plead that they were only obeying orders for the past five years.

The Budget has not addressed the real problems facing the country. Commenting on the task facing the Chancellor this week, *The Sunday Times* said:

"The economy is in the middle of what could be the deepest recession since the war. Unemployment has been rising for a year and is heading back towards 3 million. Company failures are at record levels. Many of the high-flying business successes of the 1980s have crashed spectacularly. Company profits have slumped. Young people given positive encouragement by the Government to buy their own homes, have found their dream has turned into a nightmare. Inflation remains unacceptably high . . . Interest rates are 13 per cent."

I make no apology for quoting at such length from a newspaper which normally supports the Government and is often reluctant to criticise Government policy. We should consider the Budget in the context of that damning indictment of the present state of the economy.

The fact that the country is in the deepest recession since the last war is nowhere more evident than in my constituency—and, no doubt, those of many of my hon. Friends. In the past few months, job losses have averaged 210 per month; in the travel-to-work area of my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of Calder Valley, more than 3,000 jobs have been lost in the past 12 months—good, highly skilled jobs that will not be easily brought back. In almost every instance, the employers who had to announce job losses or factory closures blamed the Government's policies, especially those that have led to high interest rates.

People should be reminded constantly that the present Prime Minister—as Chancellor and as a Treasury Minister —and the present Chancellor are responsible for the scale of the present recession, and for the mess in which we now

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

find ourselves. I do not accept the Chancellor's argument that we should blame high wage increases. The Government always fall back on that argument, but the public are increasingly aware of the identity of the guilty people—guilty men, in this case.

I am sorry that the Prime Minister has left the Chamber, because last week I received a letter from a constituent—an employer—that was addressed to him. The letter began:

"Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

THIS COUNTRY IS GOING DOWN THE DRAIN."

It continued:

"In 1983 due to the recession, I was in the unfortunate position of being made redundant from a large Machine Tool Manufacturer in Halifax, as the Company ceased to manufacture in the U.K.

Due to difficulty in finding employment, I decided to form my own company and therefore capitalise on the skills which I had acquired through working for 22 years in the machine tool industry. I would like to think that this was a successful move and until recently I employed 25 people".

The letter went on to describe the success of the venture, and how hard the staff had worked. It continued:

"I along with many other small companies am facing difficult financial times and possible bankruptcy.

When will someone in government realise that without a manufacturing base Britain's economy cannot and will not survive. After all, we cannot become a nation of shopkeepers relying solely on banking and the service industries. Without a manufacturing base, the import situation becomes more predominant which in turn increases the balance of payment problems.

Over the past few months, I have been trying to widen my customer base, but have constantly been met by a doom and gloom syndrome from the major manufacturers in industry as many companies are on short time and are facing forced redundancy programmes or even closure.

Someone in your government made a statement in the recent past that with regard to inflation 'If it isn't hurting it isn't working', well Mr. Prime Minister it definitely is hurting, because more and more people are not working, not if I may comment, the best way to cure inflation."

We have had 11 years of Tory misrule, and have been warned many times that we would find ourselves in our present position. In 1985, the House of Lords produced an excellent report on overseas trade which warned of the consequence of neglecting manufacturing industry. I quoted from that report at some length in my first speech in the House. The report stated:

"Cheaper money would lead to more investment. The Government should have more regard to the needs of industry as a borrower when they take a view on interest rates."

It seems that that plea has been completely ignored.

Many other warnings and recommendations have been ignored over the years. Earlier this year, the CBI president, Sir Brian Corby, launched a fierce attack on the Government's economic policies, accusing them of interest rate overkill. He also warned that high electricity prices would deal a savage blow to major manufacturers; none the less, prices have been increased excessively.

The newly privatised water companies have also increased their bills. Yorkshire Water has introduced an increase of 12·7 per cent., 3 per cent. more than inflation. That has proved very damaging to industry, especially the textile industry. I make no apology for mentioning the industries which operate in my area. Textile production requires the use of a good deal of water, and the increased costs have helped to damage the chances that the industry might have had of making a recovery.

Although the small amount of assistance that the Budget will give to businesses may help a little on the margins, the Chancellor's speculations that it would achieve anything dramatic were, in my view, wildly optimistic. It will do nothing to help the crippled house building and construction industries, or to help young people who are desperate to learn a skill. Recently, I told the House about a 17-year-old in my constituency who had been made redundant twice. In the local paper, he pleaded for the chance to become a joiner. That is a skill that we shall need in the future. I hope that there will be a happy ending for that young man because of the publicity given to his case, but thousands like him have been neglected and thrown on the scrap heap by the Government. The Budget does nothing to address training needs, and I know that my hon. Friends will have more to say about that.

The Government have not yet responded to the latest disturbing report from the House of Lords. Entitled, "Innovation in Manufacturing Industry", the report told the Government what they should be doing. It pointed out that there was

"no net investment in manufacturing industry during the 1980s",

and that

"if market forces alone are to determine the course of events it is conceivable we will end up with no significant British owned manufacturing industry in the U.K."

The same report found that the United Kingdom was the only country in which gross domestic expenditure on research and development had declined as a percentage of gross domestic product between 1981 and 1989, and that that decline had been largely the result of a reduction in Government support for research and development.

Such a serious and irresponsible neglect of research and development during the oil-rich years is unforgivable. The Government have thrown away the chance to invest in this country's future with the ease and abandon of Mississippi gamblers, without showing any remorse—certainly the Chancellor's complacent Budget speech showed none.

When hon. Members raised the recession and the consequent problems in their areas with Ministers, as I did recently, the response was a deliberate misquotation of a CBI report on Yorkshire and Humberside. That was an attempt to cover up the Government's neglect of the manfacturing industry. I have a copy of the report. The Minister concerned clung to the straw provided by the observation:

"Against the national trend, business optimism actually fell by less in January. On balance though respondents were still heavily pessimistic about the business situation compared with a year ago."

The Minister seemed to think that that allowed people to feel proud of how well their areas were doing. That is nonsense—Orwellian doublespeak of the worst order.

The same report said that the food, drink and tobacco industries were not doing too badly; but the Chancellor now proposes to increase VAT by 2·5 per cent., which will harm some of those industries. It will hit the largest factory in my constituency—Nestle, previously Rowntree Mackintosh—which has been very successful. In the United Kingdom, manufacturers of chocolate and sugar confectionery and chocolate-coated biscuits pay the standard rate of VAT, while all other foods are zero-rated. They are therefore already at a disadvantage. Surely a KitKat is part and parcel of a snack meal nowadays, and

I do not believe that VAT should be charged. The proposed increase will make it more difficult for successful companies to compete and to sell.

The Budget contains no measures to help the low paid, and only a pittance for recipients of child benefit to be paid in October. Anyone who has studied the subject of child benefit, or has read any of the excellent reports from the Child Poverty Action Group, will know that child benefit constitutes investment in the next generation. It will benefit future generations. The Government have behaved disgracefully, first by freezing child benefit and then by increasing it by only a small amount. It is ludicrous to suggest that VAT is a fair form of taxation. Like the poll tax, it takes no account of income and is deeply regressive. Everyone pays the same amount of VAT.

The Budget is timid and lacks vision, reflecting the leadership of the Conservative party, and I am certain that it will be the present Chancellor's first and last Budget.

6.30 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): The two-inch or three-inch wadge of Treasury notes, briefing papers, departmental press releases and other documents provided by the Vote Office to flesh out the Budget fills me with apprehension about taking part in the first day's debate on the Budget. In the middle of that wadge of papers there may be a statement that would destroy the raison d'être for my speech. However, the Budget sends a clear message that the Government are their own Government, with their own style, that they are interested in enterprise and that they are pointing the way towards economic recovery.

I do not intend to indulge in speculation about the community charge. I want to see how it is to be reformed before passing any verdict. Nevertheless, the Chancellor's statement appears effectively to have shot the Opposition's fox. To judge from their faces, they did not welcome it with smiles and glee. They seemed to be extremely miserable. The Budget statement appears to be a substantial stride in the right direction and it ought to ensure that the Conservative party forms the Government after the election.

I intend to confine my remarks to businesses, particularly small businesses, and to consider the effect that the Budget will have on investment in manufacturing and research and development and on our attempts to defeat what is now called short-termisim. The move towards helping businesses is most welcome. It proves that the Government want to support and encourage small businesses. I hope that as a result of the Budget businesses will invest more in manufacturing and in research and development. That is the basis on which this country will go forward.

The Budget gives the lie to all those newspaper pundits who said that it would be a dull and boring Budget and that very little would come out of it. Indeed, it has been one of the most exciting and complex Budgets ever presented. It will be some time before all its ramifications are appreciated by the pundits. Over the years, the Government have set an excellent example by promoting the interests of small businesses. The Budget solidly reinforces their commitment.

The Chancellor mentioned a formidable list of items. To go through each one in detail would be unfair and would take up too much of the time at my disposal, but the problem of bad debts has been recognised. In the past, if people did not pay their debts, small businesses still had to pay VAT on whatever had been sold. It is a significant improvement that that liability has been reduced to one year.

Cash accounting schemes are to be promoted. Small businesses—particularly small small businesses—do not keep fully up to date with the latest management methods. People have their noses too near to the grindstone and are too busy working away to worry about intricate financial opportunities. I am delighted, therefore, that Customs and Excise is to introduce a promotional scheme to increase the number of firms using the scheme from 100,000 to 300,000.

The Chancellor has announced that the VAT threshold is to be increased to £35,000. If I could be given £1 for every minute of debating time in the House during which I have pleaded with the Treasury to argue strongly that the European Community ought to increase the threshold, I should retire a very rich man. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has been able to persuade the Community of the rightness of his argument. Many small businesses will be delighted at what he has achieved. It is a sensible proposal. It cannot make economic sense for Customs and Excise to run around trying to collect VAT from companies with turnovers between £20,000 and £25,000. The proposal is very much a step in the right direction. The same is true of PAYE collection. Quarterly collections will save Customs and Excise and in turn the Treasury high administration costs.

The easing of corporation tax will provide substantial support for both large and small businesses. Entrepreneurs will be encouraged by the capital gains tax proposals. The fact that the amount of relief is to be increased if they decide to come out of a business is also to be welcomed.

When further national assets are disposed of, I hope that use will be made of retail outlets in the high street. I hope that share shops will be set up so that people will be able to buy small numbers of shares through such outlets without having to flog up to the stock exchange and work their way through that expensive system. Small is beautiful. That could be a means by which people would be able to use the local marketplace to move into share ownership.

My right hon. Friend has done a magnificent job for the small business sector. He has presented an excellent Budget in tight circumstances. However, I intend to amplify the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) who pleaded for more investment in manufacturing and in research and development. This country's manufacturing base will provide for our future growth and development. To those who wave the service sector flag vigorously, I say, "Well done—good luck to you." However, we must never forget that 80 per cent. of our manufactures can be exported, compared with only 20 per cent. of the service sector.

In view of the limited time at my disposal, I must resist the impulse to repeat, word for word, all that I have said in the past four years about the need to invest in manufacturing and to defeat short-termism. However, we must not run away from the fact that as a percentage of our gross national product we, among all the G7 countries, invest the least in manufacturing. Is it a coincidence that Japan invests 50 per cent. more than the average invested by all the G7 countries? Furthermore, is it a coincidence that Japan has a balance of trade surplus, low inflation and low interest rates?

[Mr. Richard Page]

Our manufacturing investment has increased in the past few years, but the message of the past year or so is that it is tailing off. I sincerely hope that those who make the decisions about manufacturing investment will reverse that trend and invest money in the future of this country. The same is true of investment in research and development. The Government invests just as much as our competitor countries in research and development, but our companies do not match that investment. The arguments relate to short-termism. Financial institutions are obsessed with league tables, percentage returns and the failure of any company to hold its position, which means that its stock is automatically sold and it is at risk from a predatory attack.

I hope that the Budget will encourage our manufacturing industries and the companies which create the wealth of this country to take a longer-term view and to start to invest in our future. The past has not been encouraging for them. I do not often quote from newspapers, but I agree with the words of David Smith in *The Sunday Times* earlier this month, when he stated:

"The well-publicised manufacturing revival of the later 1980s was from far too small a base and failed to keep pace with the much stronger rise in consumer demand."

That has to be reversed and investment made—only in that way can we stay ahead and provide the services that the Conservatives, as a caring Government, would like to provide for this country.

In conclusion, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made a substantial commitment to business, and especially to small business. He has given relief to companies to help with cash flow problems. It is up to companies to use that. I hope that the financial institutions will not be too long in providing the same sort of support and encouragement. As I have said, the Budget sends a clear message to the country—that the Government are their own Government. They have their own style. They are interested in enterprise and in business, and point the way to recovery for the future.

6.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): People will have wanted above all to hear announcements from the Chancellor about two things in today's Budget —the poll tax and income tax. They have certainly heard something new about the first, but have not yet heard anything new about the second. People also wanted to hear that interest rates would come down. I guess that they will come down pretty soon, and the economy will not recover until they do——

Mr. Bell: That may be as soon as tomorrow.

Mr. Hughes: As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) rightly says, that may be as soon as tomorrow. A reduction in interest rates is the precondition for many of the other things that everybody wishes to see.

Many things were not in the Budget which should have been. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will address those issues more widely tomorrow. The money allocated to education is a minimal concession that does not go in the right direction. Money should have been put back into training, instead of massive cuts being made that affect especially inner-city areas all over the country. Money should also have been announced for public transport.

Of course, there were some good things in the Budget. I refer to the rightful extra taxation on alcohol and tobacco, the second because it is bad for our health. There were also the rightful decisions to reduce mortgage interest tax relief for higher-rate tax payers, and to increase the amount of child benefit and index it in the future, which should have been done in the past.

Above all, there is one thing that the Budget was and one thing that it was not. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said that it was the "poll-tax Budget". The hon. Lady did not get it quite right. This was the "end-of-the-poll-tax Budget" or the "after-the-poll-tax Budget". It was a blue Budget, because it was an electorally populist Budget, but it was also a red Budget —red with embarrassment about the poll tax mistakes of the past.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) used one word many times in his speech— "short-termism". I normally accuse the Government of short-termism, but on this occasion I applaud them for this one exception. If ever there was a short-term tax, it must be the poll tax. It will probably turn out to be the most short-term tax in British history. Within a year of its existence in England and Wales, and within two years of its introduction in Scotland, the Government realised that it needed to go. The electors of Ribble Valley, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Carr), made certain of that.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Where is the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman asks where my hon. Friend is. He is here now. He was in his place throughout the Budget statement. He will be a Member of the House throughout this Parliament and, I am sure, for many Parliaments to come. Any hon. Member who can bring down the poll tax deserves to be re-elected until he decides to retire.

The one thing that the Budget was not was a green Budget, although the Government hinted that it would be. They said that there would be all sorts of green things in it, but that was a hollow sham. In terms of the environment, it was a grey Budget, because that was the one missing subject. It was hardly mentioned. The Budget confirms even more clearly than the White Paper produced by the Department of the Environment last year that that Department regularly loses its battle with the Treasury.

In his Budget statement last year, the then Chancellor —now the Prime Minister—claimed that one of the objectives of the Government's economic policy was to enable this country to take the opportunities of the 1990s. One of those opportunities is to deal with the environmental problems in this country and far beyond our seas. However, even the pale green policies in last autumn's Green Paper have not been followed through. The White Paper last autumn foreshadowed a series of measures to introduce new economic instruments. This Budget was the first opportunity—the unique opportunity —to do that. It was the test of the Government's green commitment—and a test which the Government have failed.

Where were the environmental measures in the Budget? Yes, there was the 15 per cent. on excise duty on fuel. There was an additional almost 1p differential between unleaded and diesel, and leaded fuel. Yes, there was the additional and very much delayed disadvantage to company car owners, which should have been introduced some time ago. However, that was all.

There was deafening silence on a charge to make polluters pay and on the use of market mechanisms as a means of controlling pollution. There was deafening silence on ensuring that new economic measures would be brought into the centre of this country's environmental policy.

We have proposed—this has been proposed in other European countries also—a pollution-added tax on activities that create pollution, with grants and subsidies to those whose activities are environmentally friendly. On transport, there should have been tax incentives for catalytic converters. The Government should have graduated vehicle excise duty to ensure that fuel-efficient cars attract less tax. The Government could have introduced zero VAT ratings for energy-efficient appliances, such as some heating appliances and home insulation materials. They could have reduced stamp duty for conservation measures in the home.

The Chancellor could have done many things in this Budget if he was committed to the environment as well as to the economy. However, there were only one or two environmental sweeteners in it—a little bit of green wrapping around one or two proposals, but there was nothing green at its centre. The Chancellor had the opportunity; he did not take it, so he failed. We shall have to await a different Government, a more committed Government——

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): A Labour Government.

Mr. Hughes: No, certainly not a Labour Government, if we are talking about environmental issues. We must await a different Government to ensure that we have a Budget that combines economic and environmentally sound policies. Sadly, we have not seen such policies today, and the Labour party could not provide them either.

6.47 pm

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): One learns that it is unwise to give instant reactions to any Budget and one must be even more circumspect than normal with this Budget. However, the one thing that must be clear to the whole House is that we have today seen act I of "The Abolition of the Poll Tax". I hope that we shall see act II on Thursday.

Today's substantial shift from local to central taxation paves the way for the abolition of the poll tax and its replacement with what I hope will be a more sensitive and intelligent property-based tax, which would be well received in my constituency of Pendle and, I suspect, in Ribble Valley also. In a lighter vein, may I suggest that if the poll tax is abolished, the Government should consider announcing a public holiday to celebrate that event. Perhaps we would see street parties and people waving and cheering up and down the country.

In a more serious vein, however, the Budget must be judged primarily as a backdrop to further reductions in interest rates. This essentially broadly neutral Budget can only have helped in that regard. I would not be so cavalier as the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) but the Budget should pave the way for further step-by-step reductions.

Among the detailed measures in the Budget, I particularly welcome the measures to help the liquidity of businesses, including the changes in the VAT regulations and the delayed payment of PAYE and national insurance and the reductions in corporation tax rates. I also welcome the new personal training allowance and the measures to encourage further investment by employees in their own firms.

I was delighted that measures were announced to tackle tax avoidance through overseas trusts. They were long overdue. I also welcome the limiting of mortgage tax relief to the basic rather than the higher rates of taxation. While we all believe in owner-occupancy, one must question the huge amounts given over the years in tax relief to home owners, which contrast with the relative lack of investment in manufacturing industry. I was particularly disappointed in the lack of specific measures to help manufacturing industry.

Too many investment portfolios have become ossified by high rates of capital gains tax. Surely it is time to consider restoring the differential between short-term and long-term capital gains. Perhaps short-term capital gains should be taxed at the top rates and long-term capital gains at reduced rates.

I was particularly disappointed that there was no announcement in today's Budget about a national lottery, which has widespread support in the House. Useful as the football trusts will be, they will provide only petty cash compared to the amount that a properly constructed, organised and Government-backed national lottery could produce. I hope that before too long the Government will bite the bullet and announce a national lottery.

I wonder whether the introduction of the treatment of mobile phones as benefits in kind is worth all the administrative effort.

In conclusion, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his first Budget. He compared himself with Desert Orchid. Desert Orchid recently fell in his last race. I regard my right hon. Friend's contribution as——

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is misleading the House. Desert Orchid came third.

Mr. Lee: In any case, Desert Orchid certainly did not win the race, whereas my right hon. Friend's Budget will unquestionably help us to move to victory in the coming general election.

6.52 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I am conscious that I must get a move on. I welcome the content and delivery of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's speech. I am delighted with the change in philosophy on child benefit, which will be increased. I am delighted with what I think will be the introduction of share shops in Britain, which will make it much easier for the man in the street to buy shares.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the 10 per cent. car tax. I went some way with him but we should remember that on 1 January 1993 all new cars throughout the EC will have to

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have catalytic converters fitted by law. That will raise the price of cars to the man in the street, so there is a case for getting rid of the 10 per cent. car tax next year to take account of the increase, brought about by necessary environmental change.

I strongly support my right hon. Friend's announcement about changing the financing of local government. To increase VAT and reduce community charge bills is the correct way to do it. Naturally, I hope that my right hon. Friend will soon be able to follow up his measures with a reduction in interest rates.

I am glad to see that the vehicle excise duty has been frozen again. If there is to be any change in that, it should certainly favour smaller cars, which use less fuel. I welcome the reduction in corporation tax for businesses, which will make it easier for companies to improve their cash flow and bring about a tax system that will encourage business to invest more in equipment, research and development, and training, for we look to the manufacturing base to finance future prosperity. After all, we are in the business of changing from a net exporter of oil and a net importer of manufactured goods to a net importer of oil and, I hope, a net exporter of manufactured goods.

I am also delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has tilted his business policy to encouraging British industry to be absolutely ready by way of training and investment for the single market in 1992 which will be upon us so soon.

In his Budget speech last year the then Chancellor said: "growth should return in 1991 towards its sustainable rate of around 2·75 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1013.]

I appreciate that there is a temporary standstill, but, from what my right hon. Friend said in his Budget last year and from what was said this afternoon, it is hoped that we shall resume growth later this year and, thereby, begin to reverse the unwelcome increase in unemployment. As I said, in the 1990s we shall see a transformation of the economy in Britain and we simply must be more conscious of the need to improve our manufacturing base.

I also welcome the tax changes on training. I have a specific point to make on the new benefits that employees will be able to claim as tax relief. As I understand it, the fees to the providers of the education or training will attract tax relief. Will that also apply to examination certification fees the travel, subsistence and accommodation costs incurred when people go for training and the cost of books and equipment? There has been a welcome change to encourage employees to better themselves by going in for more training. I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced this afternoon, but I hope that it will be an all-embracing change that will mean that individuals who take the trouble to retrain themselves can claim tax relief on the costs which are inevitable if one retrains, as manufacturing industry changes and greater opportunities arise.

Of course, there is an important role for the public sector in what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor rightly referred to as his anti-recession, anti-inflation Budget. In the public sector we need more performance-related pay and more locally determined pay and conditions. The public sector must adapt and bring in the best practices of industry in the way in which it settles pay and conditions. There is not yet enough performance-related pay in the public sector. There is no reason why the public sector should not quickly adopt the best practice in industry throughout Britain.

The public services include the much-improved services that have been announced for retraining unemployed people. Several changes have been made in the past 10 years in the way in which we manage our training and employment services. I hope that the training and enterprise councils, which are organised on a county basis, will be effective in delivering quality training at the local level. It is only by responding to the needs of local industry and satisfying its training needs that we shall be ready to take advantage of the single market and improve the quality of goods in Britain and the quality of training of those who produce them.

The measures in the Budget need time to take effect. His measures on business taxation and corporation tax, his change in philosophy in child benefit and his reorganisation of local government finance all need time. There is absolutely no need to rush to the country and ask for a mandate. The Chancellor of the Exchequer needs at least 12 months for the wise, progressive and imaginative proposals in his Budget to take effect and to take root in the country. When he has given us a second Budget we can go and talk nicely and politely to the electorate and, I am sure, enter a fourth term of office.

Debate adjourned.—[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Business of the House

6.59 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The House will have heard my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announce in his Budget statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment would introduce legislation shortly to authorise payments of extra grants to local authorities and to ensure that community charge payers will reap the full benefit.

I thought that it would be for the convenience of the House—*[Interruption.]*—I am sure that it would be for the convenience of the House and more generally if I made a short business statement about the arrangements for handling the Bill.

In view of the urgent nature of this legislation, the Bill will be published on Thursday. It will be proposed that all stages of the Bill are taken on Tuesday 26 March and are preceded by a timetable motion to achieve this.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): This is an act of sheer desperation on the part of the Conservative Government, an act of panic—the Government taking action which truly merits the hackneyed phrase of the Tory party: "throwing money at the problem".

Will the Leader of the House make it clear that it is the Government's intention to introduce a guillotine to force this Bill through the House next week, and that proper debate on the use of between £4 billion and £5 billion of taxpayers' money is to be curtailed to suit the convenience of the Tory party and the Government? Is it not already clear that this one-off, desperate measure will mean that the poll tax will stay in place for many people? This is not an abolition of the poll tax Bill; it is a buying-off of opposition to the poll tax Bill.

I make it clear that there can be no guarantee in advance that the Labour party will give an easy passage to this legislation or support it in the Lobbies.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) will know from the Chancellor's statement that this follows the Chancellor's conclusion that local taxes are being asked to bear too large a burden and that the level of the community charge is still too high. That was the clear explanation in the Chancellor's speech.

I can confirm that there will be a timetable motion. The reason for that is that I believe that both local authorities and all community charge payers will wish the House to pass the legislation swiftly to ensure that the arrangements can be put in place and that Parliament will have completed its work before we rise for the Easter recess. It will enable the arrangements to be put in place. That is very much what local authorities would wish and certainly what community charge payers would wish. That is why we are doing it.

I have noted that the hon. Member for Copeland indicates that the Labour party will fight this tooth and nail——

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): He did not say that.

Mr. MacGregor: All right, they are not going to fight it tooth and nail, but they are going to go on opposing—I am not exactly clear what they are doing. Let me put it this way. The Bill will be published on Thursday. I hope that, when the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues see the Bill, they will realise that it is very much in the interests of community charge payers, and that it is therefore desirable that the Bill gets through as quickly as possible.

Once the Bill is published, it will be part of the Budget debate, so it will be possible to debate the issues involved, since it is part of the Budget statement, on Thursday and on Monday as well as throughout Tuesday. That is plenty of time for the House, and I therefore think that the motion that I have proposed is a sensible one.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must remind hon. Members that we are now in private business time. *[Interruption.]* Well, we are, and the statement is a very narrow one.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only desperation is on the part of Opposition Members who see their foxes shot, not least their allegation that the Government have been dithering? What on earth are they complaining about?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. After due consideration, we have come to conclusions, and we are now taking decisive action. That is the right thing to do.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Bill to which the Leader of the House has referred affect England, Scotland and Wales, and will statements be made to the House by the Ministers concerned?

Can the Leader of the House tell us of any previous occasions, and if so when, on which a significant piece of local government and tax legislation was forced through the House of Commons on a guillotine motion in one day?

Can the Leader of the House tell us whether, having had to throw money on the scale of billions into the hole that the Government have created with the poll tax, he is now prepared to throw democracy out of the window at the same time?

Mr. MacGregor: The Bill will cover England, Scotland and Wales, and it will be clear, as I say, when it is published on Thursday. That will give plenty of time for the House to consider the Bill. I am advised that the Bill is a short one and that there will therefore be enough time for it to be fully considered before we come to debate it specifically on Tuesday.

There is at least one precedent: the Finance (Income Tax Reliefs) Bill, which went through in one day on Thursday 17 November 1977. I seem to recall that the party of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was participating in a pact round about that time, but it went through in one straight day.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement today will be very enthusiastically welcomed in areas such as Gosport, which has a modest rateable value and where therefore the impact of the community charge was quite heavy? Is he also aware that, between the Budget statement and this business statement, there was a most successful meeting between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Conservative Members upstairs, and that perhaps the warm welcome for the Budget is the reason why the Labour party is so upset?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon Friend is absolutely right on the second point. On the first point, I am sure that not only is it to the advantage of the

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community charge payers of Gosport that we get this Bill through quickly, as we propose, but also that they will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members not to make points that might legitimately be made during the course of debate, or party political points. For the convenience of the House, this is a statement about this new Bill; we should confine our questions to that.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the statement, because it reflects the fact that the Secretary of State for the Environment has paid attention to the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) and for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe). Will this Bill therefore include the welcome news of the Chancellor for the ratepayers of Northern Ireland, or must we wait until another occasion? It would be a scandal if it were not included in the Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: The important point is what the Chancellor said in his statement—that domestic rate bills in Northern Ireland will be reduced as well.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the Labour party's reaction to his statement? Does he agree that their behaviour——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is just what I hoped hon. Members would not do. Ask about the business statement, please.

Mr. Wilshire: That is precisely what I was doing. We have a business statement, and we must consider the response to it. Opposition Members are reacting to my right hon. Friend's sensible suggestion like a bunch of headless chickens. They are clutching at anything because they are desperate to prevent us doing precisely what they asked us to do. What is all the fuss about?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am surprised at their reaction because I have announced that we intend to proceed with the Bill in a way that is convenient not only for the House but for local authorities and many others. They want to know the timetable applying to my right hon. Friend's statement in relation to the Bill. That is all I have announced and I believe that it will be for the convenience of all and will be widely supported.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Leader of the House accept that the organisation of, and financial arrangements for, the poll tax differ in England, Scotland and Wales? Given the time constraint on the debate on Tuesday, will he give an assurance that the Secretary of State for Wales will make a statement on Thursday about the implications of the changes that are the background to the financial change that we shall discuss on Tuesday?

Mr. MacGregor: My statement tonight is purely about the business handling of the Bill: it is not about the wider background or about anything to do with the community charge more generally. I am tonight simply talking about the arrangements for carrying the Bill through.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It might be for the convenience of the House if I remind hon. Members that the Leader of the House has already said that the issues will be debatable during the passage of the Bill. I think that I shall have to take into account, when I come to draw up my list of hon. Members who wish to participate in that debate, those who are raising issues now.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the narrow Bill in question will be designed specifically to ensure that Scottish community charge payers, among others, will get the benefits of the transfer from community charge to value added tax, which I recommended in my paper—*[Interruption.]*—on the subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend will try to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, in the debate, but I confirm that that is what the Bill is about.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that for the last 12 years Opposition Members have pressed the Government not to withdraw the billions of pounds in resources that have been taken out of local services? So we are the last to be churlish about putting money back in that direction.

Earlier in the day, your Deputy in the Chair, Mr. Speaker, called this the mother of Parliaments. To push through a Bill in one day, curtailing debate on issues as complicated as how local authorities will deal with the consequences of the community charge reduction scheme, the rebate scheme and the administrative costs and chaos that will result—the residents of the borough of Wandsworth will end up with no bill at all in the coming year for the provision of local services—is unacceptable, especially on such matters of major national importance.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on the first part of that supplementary question, which is a matter for another debate. The Bill does not relate to all the points to which the hon. Gentleman latterly referred. It is a straightforward, simple Bill to fulfil what the Chancellor talked about this afternoon. That is why the time that we are giving to it, as well as the time that will be available during the Budget debates to deal with it, is adequate.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that there will be enough time to discuss the Bill next Tuesday, bearing in mind the fact that, according to my calculations, it will benefit tens of millions of people, and that the only people who will be worse off are single-person households who spend at least £5,000 a year on VAT-able goods and services and double-person households who spend at least £10,000 a year on such items? In other words, a great contribution towards the community charge reductions will be paid by foreign visitors, tourists and wealthy people. Are Opposition Members proposing that those people should be supported?

Mr. MacGregor: Without going into the details, I am sure that my hon. Friend is right that large numbers of people will benefit from the Bill and will wish to see it proceeding through Parliament as quickly as possible, given that it is short and that the issues are straightforward. Not only should they have that benefit, but local authorities should have the opportunity to know exactly where they stand, so that they can make their

planning arrangements before the financial year begins. There are clearly many reasons in favour of the procedure that I have put to the House.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Is the Leader of the House, as something of an exiled Scot, aware that Scotland was used as a guinea pig for the poll tax? We had it a year ahead of any other part of the United Kingdom. Is it not a trifle bizarre that the Bill which we shall debate next week and which will be pushed through expeditiously will absolve some payments in Northern Ireland, in terms of impact of rates, when the people there have never had the poll tax? Although we in Scotland will have had it for nearly three years, we shall receive only the same type of compensation as will be awarded to charge payers in England and Wales.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that any points relating to the procedure or the business statement arise out of that supplementary question.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his proposals and suggested timetable are warmly welcomed by his hon. Friends, especially as they show at long last the Government's determination to get to grips with local government spending, which has got totally out of control? Is he further aware that his proposals will be welcomed nowhere more than in the county of Cumbria, where the county council showed its total lack of ability to control expenditure, in that, with a £302 million budget, it set its spending £1,000 below the capping level?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has given good reasons to support the procedure that I am recommending to the House and that we hope to follow next week.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is no precedent for acting in the way that he proposes? Almost immediately after hearing the Budget statement, the Leader of the House tells us that a panic measure is afoot and that we are to look at the whole of local government finance in one day. When that issue was last looked at, it took several years. There was supposed to be "nothing ruled in, nothing ruled out", with a full discussion and examination of all the issues. That is now being telescoped into one day's debate. It is scandalous.

Mr. MacGregor: I am surprised at the right hon. Gentleman, who is normally very fair about matters of this type and considers them carefully. He is suggesting that the Bill is about the whole area of local government finance and is one of the outcomes of the community charge review. The Chancellor made it clear this afternoon that that was not the case. He said:

"My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be announcing very soon the conclusions of our review of local government."

The Bill is about the Chancellor's statement this afternoon that local taxes are being asked to bear too large a burden. It is about that one issue. I am beginning to think, from the way Opposition Members are reacting, that they are rattled—*[Interruption.]* We shall be interested to see their reaction to the Bill and hear sustained and detailed objections sufficient to show that the proposal that I am announcing is not reasonable.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the past six months, the methods of tax collecting for local government and matters concerned with the duties of local authorities and the ability of people to pay for them have been exhaustively discussed, in a way that they have never been discussed before? Does he further agree that many of those debates have been called by Her Majesty's Opposition when the utter emptiness of the arguments have been matched only by the emptiness of the Opposition Benches? My right hon. Friend's timetabling on this occasion is totally correct.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is not the time to speak about the merits or demerits of the Bill, but it is certainly the time to speak about the Government's proposals to handle—or, rather, mishandle—its passage. No local government finance measure has ever been treated in such an extraordinarily abrupt and dictatorial way. The Leader of the House is inflicting on us nothing short of contempt. He is using procedures which the House has used in the past to deal with grave national crises simply to rescue himself from the serious political crisis in which the Tories find themselves.

Mr. MacGregor: That is simply not the case. I am merely announcing how we intend to proceed with the Bill to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred. As next week is the last week before the Easter recess, it must be for the convenience of the House to have this information. Of course, I shall make the normal business statement on Thursday. On that occasion, I shall announce the rest of the business for next week and, I hope, some of the business for the week of our return. Clearly, it will be to the advantage of all those affected by the Bill that it should be proceeded with expeditiously, so that the legislation may be in place before the start of the financial year. That is why we are taking these steps.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): May I support Opposition Members, particularly those from Wales and Scotland, who are quite rightly calling for three Bills? This measure is intended to ensure that local taxpayers will pay less. Surely it would be only fair to equalise percentages among taxpayers in Scotland, in England and in Wales. My constituents will probably have their community charge reduced by at least £200, while those in Scottish and Welsh constituencies will get a reduction of only about £100.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend raises a wider point that he may wish to deploy on another occasion. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in his Budget statement, made clear what the Bill will achieve and what the community charge reduction will be. As the change will apply throughout the country, one Bill is the right way to proceed.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): While the Opposition readily welcomed the Government's proposal, I put it to the Leader of the House that, in view of the agony in which the Government now find themselves, they ought to explain the position of the thousands of people who are at present in the process of being prosecuted. Will the prosecutions be suspended as a result of this legislation?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman must know perfectly well that this Bill relates to next year: my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made that clear. Throughout the country, there is condemnation of those who have refused to pay the community charge this year.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Does my right hon. Friend believe that those hon. Members who so far have not paid any part of their community charge may be tempted by this announcment to do so?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that I made the position clear a moment ago.

Mr. Robert Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Now the the Tory flagship has proved to be about as watertight as the Titanic, will the Leader of the House tell us what we are entitled to know? What will the title of the Bill be, how many clauses will it have, and will the timetable motion be taken between 3.30 pm and 7 pm on Tuesday? Is this House to be asked to deal with an entire Bill on local government finance between 7 o'clock and the end of the parliamentary day? What is proposed is for party convenience rather than for parliamentary convenience.

Mr. MacGregor: Actually, it is for the convenience of the wider public. The Bill will be introduced tomorrow, and will be published on Thursday. We shall also publish a timetable motion this week. The detail of the proposal will then be clear.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As I have already said, we are eating into private business time. I shall allow questions on the business statement to continue for a further seven minutes.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Government will not buy off the British electorate with this money. People are not stupid; they know what is going on. Throughout the north-west of England, where people's anger will not be abated by this announcement, there will be much concern. People will still be faced with poll tax bills on average of more than £250. The Leader of the House quoted a precedent for what is to be done on Tuesday. Can he confirm that the 1977 legislation was not guillotined?

Mr. MacGregor: In his opening comments, the hon. Gentleman strayed very wide of the business statement. The Bill to which he referred went through in one day. We believe that, in the interests of the wider public, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents, it is right that this Bill should complete its passage next week.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Does the Leader of the House realise that, even at this late stage, there is such a thing as credibility in politics? If the right hon. Gentleman ever had any credibility, he has done his best tonight to shed it. His handling of this measure is an absolute affront to the House of Commons. It was he who extended the length of the Easter recess. Now he has the nerve to tell hon. Members that, while they are about to have an extra week's holiday, the Government intend to guillotine legislation that will have a vital effect on every person in this country.

The Leader of the House and his hon. and right hon. Friends are pathetic sights. Having queued up to obey a three-line Whip by going through the Lobbies to introduce the poll tax and, thereby, punish the people of this country, they will queue up to obey a three-line Whip on Tuesday by going through the Lobby in support of legislation to get rid of it. This is sheer political opportunism, for which the British electorate will not easily forgive the Government.

Mr. MacGregor: I refute the hon. Gentleman's charge. I am slightly sorry that he made it. I have tried to make it clear that the purpose of trying to get this Bill through next week, irrespective of the Easter recess, is to enable all the necessary procedures to be put in place before the beginning of the financial year. There is no connection with the extra week in the Easter recess.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will this Bill be amendable? It will get rid of only one third of the poll tax bills of Londoners next year. Some hon. Members, including myself, would like to get rid of the other two thirds. Indeed, we should like to see the Bill do away with the whole poll tax system. Will it be possible to amend the legislation in that way?

Mr. MacGregor: The Bill is about the issue which I have described and to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred this afternoon. If the House should so decide, this measure, like any other, may be amended.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Can the Leader of the House confirm that, today, he sent the chief executives of all local authorities a message that they should suspend the dispatch of all poll tax bills? Can he confirm that local authorities will be reimbursed for the chaos caused by something whose purpose was to convenience the Government? Or will he tell us that, having ridden roughshod over local authorities for the past 12 years, the Government are about to ride roughshod over Parliament?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not really a matter for me. It does not relate to the business statement. While I cannot go into details, I can say that I understand that local authorities will be reimbursed for their administrative costs.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Government are taking the unprecedented step of guillotining a Bill before it has been published. Is it their intention to go even further and curtail the democratic rights not only of this House but of another place to debate the Bill? The Government seem to be intent on setting new precedents and devising new ways of negating democracy.

Mr. MacGregor: For reasons that I have already explained, it is desirable that we get the Bill through both Houses of Parliament before the Easter recess. We hope that it will be possible to have all the stages completed next week. The reason for my making this statement tonight is that everyone should know what is proposed.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): In a business statement lasting a mere two or three minutes, the Leader of the House has demeaned both his office and himself. *[Interruption.]* We can take very easily the sneers and jeers of the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends, who will have to jump through a hoop willingly, just as they jumped through a hoop in the opposite direction in the last two or three years. The job of the Leader of the House is to protect the interests of its Members.

I wish to put to the right hon. Gentleman two questions that so far he has been totally unable to answer. First, is there any precedent for a Bill of this sort being guillotined and taken through in a day? Second—the simplest of all questions—will the right hon. Gentleman tell us, with the benefit of his inside Cabinet knowledge, what the Bill's title is?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman made that last point. As Leader of the House, I am doing what I have been frequently urged to do—keeping the House informed as early as possible of arrangements proposed for the recess and for everything else.

I do not quite know how a Bill of this sort would be defined, so I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's first question—purely in relation to the guillotine, that is. As for his second question, it is surely right to follow the usual process, which is that, when the Bill is introduced, its title will become known.

Dr. Cunningham: Does not the Leader of the House owe the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the House an apology? Was not his answer about precedents for this Bill dishonest? Should not he now apologise for misleading the House when he said that there were precedents for Bills being treated in this way, because clearly there are none? Is it not clear that the Conservatives' flagship is being not so much abandoned as deliberately scuttled by all the Conservative Members who went through the Lobbies and voted for it? And will not people seeing hospitals closed, waiting lists for operations lengthened and schools crumbling be astonished that, although money is not available for those problems, £4·5 billion can be found to buy off opposition to the poll tax?

As the Leader of the House wants proper consideration of this Bill, why did he not tell us what it is called and how many clauses are in it? If he does not have a name for the Bill, I will suggest one: the Save the Tories' Skin Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will forgive me for straying into the hon. Gentleman's point of policy substance, but it is important to stress that what my right hon. Friend announced today was a change in financing arrangements, not a change in overall public expenditure.

As for precedents, for the avoidance of all doubt I reiterate that the precedent to which I referred when I responded earlier was one of many cases of all stages of Bills being taken in one day. [HON. MEMBERS: "They were not guillotined."] I have already explained, and will say again, just to make the position absolutely clear, that it is very much for the convenience of community charge payers, and especially for local authorities, that the arrangements should be put in place as quickly as possible after the start of the financial year. That is why we believe it important that the Bill should get through next week, and it is why we have decided to follow the procedure that I have outlined.

I have also stressed that I understand that this is to be a short Bill which the whole House will see on Thursday. There will be opportunities to refer to it on Thursday and on Monday as well as throughout its stages on Tuesday.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely the House is entitled to know that this Bill is to be called the Labour (Shooting of Fox) (No. 1) Bill?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take some points of order, but the House must bear in mind other hon. Members' time, into which we are now eating.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few moments ago you said, and the Leader of the House repeated it—perhaps trying to acquire the authority of the fact that you said it—that it will be possible for us to debate the contents of this Bill on Thursday and on Monday. That will not help Members who speak in the debate tomorrow, but there is a more important point than that.

Those of us with experience of Bills such as the poll tax legislation know that their details are explored only by way of amendment. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that Conservative Members tabled amendments to the poll tax legislation which had great bearing on the problems that have since arisen. As I understand it—you will correct me if I am wrong—it will not be possible to table amendments to this Bill before we know its name, before it is published or, unless there is a special motion, before Second Reading; so it will not be possible to table amendments exploring the details of the Bill, or for Members to seek answers from Ministers on those details——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I never said that. If the hon. Gentleman was listening carefully, he will know that it was the Leader of the House who said it. What I said was that we can discuss this matter in business questions on Thursday——

Mr. Beith: Ah. Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that it will not be possible to refer to amendments to the Bill during proceedings on the Budget on Friday, Thursday or Monday, and that only the time allocated by the Leader of the House will be available for amendments, some of which may not even be considered. Am I right in that assumption?

Mr. Speaker: Quite right—everybody knows that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are eating into private business time.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is evident that it is the Government who have placed you and the House in this difficulty. It is quite clear that there is no precedent for a major Bill of this sort being timetabled, so may I urge you——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Madden: May I urge you to urge the Government not to proceed with a guillotine motion, and to allow a second day for debate on this Bill?

Mr. Speaker: These are patently matters for the usual channels, not for the Chair.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Well, Mrs. Fyfe.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is not clear from what the Leader of the House said whether a Scottish Office Minister will be present for the debate to answer questions about the impact on Scotland.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you now extend questions to the Leader of the House for at least another quarter of an hour——

Mr. Speaker: No, I will not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because Scottish Members have been called.

Mr. Maxton: Further to that point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Sit down, please. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to complain if his time were taken up by points of order of this kind.

Mr. Maxton: Nonsense.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You kindly referred to the fact that there was a need for the usual channels to negotiate aspects of the legislation. I wonder whether you, as protector of the House, can extract from the Leader of the House agreement to a meeting with representatives of all parties in the House before the business statement on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that sensible suggestion will have been heard. Now we will proceed——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call two more hon. Members and then proceed with the British Railways Bill.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sad that you did not take up the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) about extending business questions slightly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already made my position clear. I have an obligation to protect the business of the House and other hon. Members who want to speak.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a guillotine has already been announced —unusually for a Bill—my point of order relates to the selection of amendments. You might be tempted to select only amendments that might fit into the pattern of the guillotine. It would help to show that some shred of democratic procedure is still left in the House—after these proposals by the Government—if you made it clear that you will not select amendments purely on the basis of the Government's allocation of time, but that you will select them in such a way that the House can see the range of amendments that could have been discussed had we been given the time.

Mr. Speaker: I assure the House that, in that respect, I shall do my duty.

The Clerk will now proceed to read the title of the private Bill set down for consideration this day.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I call Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

British Railways Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

7.39 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask hon. Members to resume their seats.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on this Bill.

Mr. Speaker: On this Bill? All right.

Mr. Nellist: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, as there was an obvious danger of at least two Opposition Members ending up with laryngitis before too long.

Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that the phrase, "business of the House" does not include private business such as the British Railways Bill? By definition, it is a Bill which affects a small section of the community, so it should not take precedence over a matter that affects the whole community. As you were railroaded or steamrollered by the Leader of the House, who bounced you into the position that you have held for the past 40 minutes, would it not be more appropriate if the business of the whole community—the poll tax—had a full hearing in place of that private business?

Mr. Speaker: Top marks for ingenuity, but the hon. Gentleman knows that we must get on with the Bill, which we should have started to discuss at 7 o'clock. It is only fair to those Members who have an interest in it.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I was endeavouring to say that the works in the Bill are designed to add to the capacity and improve the safety and reliability of the railway system. The shift to rail implicit in the schemes is good for the relief of congestion, for the environment and, ultimately, for the taxpayer. In many areas, British Rail is currently investing substantially in growth. It is perhaps worth remembering that the electrification of the east coast main line to Newcastle, Edinburgh and Carstairs which will take place in July this year will bring Edinburgh within four hours of London for the first time.

The Networker project is designed to bring more capacity on routes around London, particularly in Kent, with the first Networker 465 due to be delivered in September this year.

As for the channel tunnel link, it is fair to say that the expenditure of £1·4 billion on channel tunnel trains, stations, depots and track upgrading for 1993 is currently in hand. A massive investment in the regional railways is taking place so that all diesel trains that are over 30 years old can be replaced by 1992.

In the longer term, projects such as the InterCity 250 will reduce journey times to the north-west, the west midlands and Strathclyde and on the crossrail link in London.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing his characteristic courtesy in giving way. He mentioned improvements in the service to Strathclyde. As a Strathclyde Member, may I ask what confidence he has

that improvements will take place in the next year or so? I receive many complaints, particularly from business men and women passengers, that the service along the west coast of Scotland and England into Euston is massively inferior to the service between Edinburgh Waverley and London King's Cross.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I prefaced my remarks with "in the longer term". My earlier comments related to events that will happen this year and changes that will take place soon. I assure the hon. Gentleman that his remarks will be passed on to the chairman of British Rail, so he will be aware of the concern of the hon. Gentleman and his constituents about the services provided in that region. I have no doubt that the point will be carefully noted.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the issue of Anglo-Scottish services, may I say that many of us who have been keen to support the measures that he outlined a moment ago are worried that the undertaking that was given to us about the restoration of sleeper and overnight services was not maintained.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the new chairman of British Rail and those of us who are most concerned—my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—were especially grateful that the chairman has agreed to reconsider the matter. However, we attach importance to undertakings that are given when private Bills go through the House and wish to ensure that they are followed up as far as is humanly possible.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I understand that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and his colleagues met the chairman of British Rail on 27 February and that an early response to his comments will be given to him. That is as far as I can go this evening, but I hope that it will satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill represents works in the shorter term and most of the projects command general support. There have been four petitioners against the Bill and the board hopes that it will be able to reach agreements with at least two of them before the Bill goes before a Select Committee.

The Bill follows the usual format for Bills of this type. Part I—clauses 1 to 4—is in line with past practice. Clause 1 deals with the short title; clause 2 deals with interpretation; clause 3 deals with incorporation of general enactments; and clause 4 deals with the application of part I of the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965.

Part II deals with the details of the works to be undertaken. Those are important because they allow British Rail to meet the increasing demand, both for additional passenger services and for freight services. I stress again that the transfer from road to rail is in everyone's interest. I shall outline the most important works, but if hon. Members have additional queries on matters to which I do not refer, I shall try to seek clarification for them.

It may be interesting to point out that many of the works are reinstatements of older works. Work No. 1 is the reinstatement of a chord line, half a mile long, at Guide Bridge in Greater Manchester. It will handle trainloads of stone for the construction industry and take them to various terminals north of Manchester. That will allow trains to run via Ashton Moss instead of the present route via Ashburys, which is undulating with severe curves. I know that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is interested in that matter, but he is, unfortunately, not in his place.

Work No. 2 is a similar reinstatement of a curve at Edge Hill, Liverpool, to allow coal trains from Gladstone Dock to reach Fiddler's Ferry power station without the need to reverse at Edge Hill, saving time and fuel through improved efficiency.

Work No. 3 is the restoration of the rail link between St. Helens and St. Helens Junction on the Liverpool to Manchester railway. The line is now used in part as a freight siding and its restoration will allow the introduction of a new passenger service between St. Helens and Warrington, with a possible subsequent extension to Ellesmere Port. The proposal has the backing of the Merseyside passenger transport executive and will contribute to the relief of traffic congestion in the area.

Work No. 4 is a temporary diversion of the railway at Bingley to allow the construction of a bridge for the new Airedale trunk road. Works No. 5 and 6 allow the construction of two extra tracks on the western approach to Leeds station to handle the increasing number of passenger trains planned for the future with the West Yorkshire passenger transport executive. The scheme will help to improve reliability and relieve congestion in West Yorkshire.

Work No. 7 is to some extent connected with the future channel tunnel project. It provides for the closure of Willesborough level crossing at Ashford—a very busy crossing on the line to Dover and the channel tunnel—where delays to traffic are already severe. A new footbridge will be provided for pedestrians, and the nearby Crow Corner bridge will be widened to take the extra road traffic.

Work No. 8 involves a chord line at Clarborough near Gainsborough, which will allow coal trains from Immingham to reach Cottam power station direct, avoiding the need to run to Retford and reverse direction there.

Work No. 9 involves a long siding at Sherburn in Elmet, between Pontefract and York, to carry trains of gypsum from the Drax power station to the works of British Gypsum Limited. The flue gas desulphurisation plant at Drax produces gypsum as a by-product, and the link allows the heavy traffic to pass by rail rather than by heavy lorry.

Other works are related to the replacement of various levels crossings, and other clauses in the Bill relate to provision for underpinning buildings, dealing with surface water, agreements with highway authorities and so on. Two changes deal with level crossings over private roads, and provide for the normal penalties for disregarding flashing red lights that would apply if the crossings were over public roads. Clause 30 deals, among other things, with the extension of platforms at Strood station in Kent to allow longer Networker trains to be run, to increase capacity and reduce overcrowding on the busy north Kent route from Charing Cross and Cannon Street.

I realise that some hon. Members may be concerned about the works that relate to the moving of coal. Concerns have been expressed about the movement of imported coal, but that is clearly not a matter for British Rail. British Rail is in the business of moving goods and passengers, and I hope that the House will agree that it is far preferable for any product that has to be moved to be moved by rail rather than road. I hope that the House will

[Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson]

welcome the works that are proposed, which are modest and which will help to build on the shift from roads to railways.

The Bill is one of a number of measures—I have had the honour of being involved in many of them over the past 10 years—and I hope that the House will allow it to go to a Select Committee because it represents an essential building block for British Rail in its continuing attempt to build a more effective and reliable service. I hope that the difficulties of the past winter are behind us. The general thrust of the board's policy is to improve its facilities and its service to passengers and freight users, and the Bill is an essential part of that process.

7.52 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have a deal of sympathy for the Bill and I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson).

I want to refer to the Anglo-Scottish service. The hon. Gentleman courteously gave way twice. The first intervention concerned the sleeper service. In particular, concern was expressed about the trains stopping in Berwick-upon-Tweed. Two hon. Members use the service —the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson).

I speak as a long-term supporter of British Rail. As someone who travels between Glasgow Central and London Euston, I can speak as a consumer. As one who occasionally travels down by train, but—regrettably, the hon. Member for New Forest may say—much more frequently travels on the shuttle service between Glasgow airport and London Heathrow, I think that unquestionably the most civilised way to travel between the two cities is by train. There is no argument about that. It is much better to travel by train than to go through a crowded Heathrow and undertake the dreadful journey from there to Westminster tube station.

There has to be some equality as between the service that runs down the west coast of Scotland and the one that runs between Edinburgh Waverley and King's Cross. For a start, I think that I am right in saying that the Edinburgh Waverley to King's Cross service is much more frequent than the Glasgow Central to Euston run. Moreover, the latter is often served by old rolling stock. Two weeks ago, my wife and I went to board the Royal Scot leaving Euston for Glasgow at 10.25 am. Given that it is supposed to be the premier train of the daily service, the rolling stock was a disgrace. The buffet service, too, was nothing short of scandalous. If British Rail is to attract passengers—particularly business passengers and tourists—we shall need not only improved travelling times between Scotland and London but improvements in on-board services offered to passengers.

As a supporter—albeit a mildly critical one—of British Rail, I hope that the company will note what I am saying, because, as I said, rail is the better mode of passenger transport between Scotland and the south-east of England. Given that passengers are to be incarcerated for more than five hours, it is nothing short of disgraceful when, on boarding a train at Glasgow Central, they are told that the buffet service is off or that no restaurant facilities are available.

Improvements are therefore required in addition to these welcome, if somewhat modest, changes and the promise of long-term changes. The hon. Member for New Forest talked about the 250 service, for example. If the train provides the kind of service that I should like to see, many Scots will be keen to travel on it.

Journey times need to be improved, as does the quality of service on board. I do not criticise the staff, who are extremely friendly and courteous, but they must be given the best facilities and resources to help them in their dealings with passengers.

If such criticisms were taken on board, I genuinely believe that there would be an increase in passenger travel on the Anglo-Scottish service.

7.57 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I want to make three extremely brief points about the Bill. The first —touched on by the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson), who moved the Second Reading in his customary able manner—concerns the moving of imported coal. Like other hon. Members, I am conscious of the contentious nature of any proposals to import coal into the United Kingdom. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, if imported coal is to be moved—and, once it is imported, it has to be moved—it is best moved by rail.

The proposals for the two chord lines at Edge Hill and Clarborough on the west and east coast respectively will keep a considerable number of heavy lorry movements off our roads. Moreover, I need hardly remind the House that if the Bill were defeated because of an objection to the moving of imported coal by rail, the coal could be moved by lorry without any reference whatever to our procedures. It is only because of our somewhat archaic way of dealing with British railways matters that we are discussing the proposals.

Secondly, I wish to record my pleasure about the restoration of the link between St. Helens and St. Helens Junction. It will provide a connection for Warrington, as well as connections for Birmingham and the west of England. If the extension goes ahead, there will be connections at Helsby for Chester and at Ellesmere Port for the electrified line serving the Wirral area. I am sure that the Merseyside passenger transport executive feels that such works will benefit the area.

My third point relates to the building of the chord line at Guide Bridge. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) has previouusly raised that matter. We appear to be in some danger of causing further inconvenience to my hon. Friend's constituents. I hope that the hon. Member for New Forest will relay our concerns to British Rail. A number of years ago, the track was reduced to a single line just south-west of Denton station,and it stretches as far as Heaton Norris junction. The current proposals will result in an increased number of heavy trains having to wait before they can enter the single line section. Some 20 years ago there were four tracks between Denton and Heaton Norris junction, but now there is just one. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will

understand the problem of congestion that could and is so easily caused, especially at night when so many freight train movements take place.

Having made those three points, I welcome the Bill on behalf of the Opposition. I wish it a fair passage through the House.

8.1 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): The Government have considered the Bill and have no objection in principle to the powers sought by the railways board. We have no points outstanding as a Department. I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading and allow it to proceed to Committee for detailed consideration in the usual way. I understand that there are four petitions against it.

8.2 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall deal first with the points raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). I know Glasgow well as my father was a doctor there. The InterCity 250 service is designed ultimately to take 30 minutes off the journey time to London and to provide the sort of benefits to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, sadly, the time scale for the project does not envisage completion until 1994. I assure him that the project is on time.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and I have discussed railway Bills for a number of years. I welcome his support and his acknowledgement of the point about the movement of imported coal, on this occasion, and generally about trying to get freight off the roads. He properly raised the question of the chord line at Guide Bridge and the worries that that is causing the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I have drawn the matter to the attention of the railways board, which was not entirely aware of the congestion. As of this evening, the matter will be re-examined. I hope that that reassures both hon. Members that the matter is now firmly under consideration.

I welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that the House will allow the Bill to go to the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed.

House of Commons (Accommodation)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

8.4 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I am glad to have this opportunity to raise the issue of House of Commons accommodation, with particular reference to phase 2 of the proposals before us. I made a new year's eve resolution. I gave a number of hours of thought to various matters, and then I came up with my resolution—to do whatever I could about the appalling conditions in which I and many others work in this House. It would have been a little selfish simply to demand that I be moved to something better, so I took the issue on board and did some research. I was absolutely amazed at what I found.

We have a little more time than usual for an Adjournment debate, so I shall begin by explaining that my office is in Commons court. It was built in the 1970s when my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Joseph was in charge, and I am told that that is why the lifts are so slow. I have to share my room, as do most of my colleagues. I share it with my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). Previously, I shared it with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) until his appointment to the Whips' Office. I am told that he has considerable affection for the room and remembers it with pleasure.

I remember that room only in that I have been there for a very long time. I occupied it from 1983 to 1986 and from January 1989 to now—some five years of my life. I know every inch of that room, every knobble on the wall and every door knob. I know it far too well.

The first problem with the room is that it is not very big. According to the recent space audit, its official size is 12 sq m. It is a room for two, which gives me 6 sq m. We must also take into account the fact that a substantial amount of the room is taken up with two desks, three chairs, a bookcase, a cupboard and the various other implements and paraphernalia of two working colleagues. That does not leave a great deal of room.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North and I made our point about the room at Christmas 1985 when we held a drinks party. We managed to get 22 people into the room, although most were standing on each other's shoulders and a number had their heads touching the ceiling. However, by the end of the drinks party we felt that we had made our point.

I want to give the House some idea of what that 6 sq m —precious little space—means. It is, of course, illegal and runs counter to the Health and Safety Executive rules, of which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is aware. I made some inquiries and discovered that one of the buildings on the nearby site that might be available to us all in some dim and distant future, well into the next century, is Canon row police station. Indeed, some of its accommodation is already used by staff of the House. It was built in 1902 and still includes the police cells, which I understand are of some historical significance. Each prisoner had not 6 sq m but 7 sq m in those police cells, so perhaps we would all be better housed if we made use of them.

The only advantage of my little room—almost my nun's cell—is that it is air conditioned, which I find helpful as I am an asthmatic. Of course, it is necessary that it

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

should be air conditioned because it has no other form of ventilation. It is an internal room with no windows and no natural light. In fact, it is a store cupboard, and it should be used as such. It should never, at any time, have been allocated for use by working people, and especially not by hon. Members. It should never have been permitted to be used by anybody. I suspect that it would not even be useful or appropriate for a photocopying machine or any machine that emitted vapours, and it is utterly unsuitable for humankind. To be absolutely honest, I suspect that I have one of the worst rooms in the Palace, although it has the advantage of being close to the Chamber, and I appreciate that.

I understand that in the recent space audit ordered by the Services Committee, it was established that some 230 hon. Members needed to be rehoused to ensure that each had a respectable, albeit small, room of their own. One third of hon. Members stand to be rehoused somehow. That does not include any further Members of the other place. I gather that most of them expressed no interest in acquiring any accommodation. That needs to be borne in mind. One third of hon. Members are inadequately housed and have to work in the sort of conditions that I have described—conditions that would be regarded with astonishment and disgust by our constituents.

The appalling conditions here make our work difficult. For example, yesterday I had two meetings with people from outside the House. One meeting included four constituents who wanted to join me in lobbying the Minister for Public Transport about improvement of our rail facilities in south Derbyshire. We had a successful meeting, but there was no way I could get them into my room. It would have been inappropriate and discourteous of me to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport to move out so that two of them could come in. We tried to book a Committee Room but found, inevitably, that they were all booked—for some frightfully important meetings on the politics of other nations, I gather.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I do not know whther my hon. Friend has been able to ascertain why some of the small Committee Rooms are booked, but in the past year it has come to my attention that they have sometimes been booked for taking Members' photographs for television companies, or by outside companies and organisations with private Bills. The result is that my constituents have not been able to meet me in relative comfort because, as my hon. Friend points out, all hon. Members have rooms which are completely unsuitable for such meetings.

Mrs. Currie: I take my hon. Friend's point entirely. The fact is that there just are not enough rooms of any kind here. I suspect that many are occupied by extremely worthy Officers of the House, Departments, and so on.

To continue with yesterday's saga, our pre-meeting was eventually held in their Lordships' House, over tea in the Pugin Room. It is not easy mixing eclairs with plans and maps—they got in everyone's way and we ended up with sticky maps. The de-briefing had to take place much later in a corridor in Marsham street, waiting for taxis in the rain. It was a thoroughly unsatisfactory situation. How on earth are we to look after our constituents, or anyone else we might want to see, if the rooms are too small to get them into?

I had another meeting, in connection with tonight's Adjournment debate, with three distinguished gentlemen all of whom have had a finger in the pie that I am describing. I made them come to my room because that seemed the easiest way of making my point. One sat at my hon. Friend's desk, who fortunately was not there, one sat in the armchair and one sat on a footstool. Again, there was simply no room for the plans or drawings. Had we wished to use anything as elaborate as visual aids, such as slides or an overhead projector, it would have been impossible. One of us would have had to go into the corridor. None of that is conducive to intelligent conversation. With respect to the officials whom I met last night, I must say that in the circumstances they did rather well.

Added to all that, my marvellous secretary is stuck in another building. She shares a room, and her working conditions are Dickensian—absolutely antediluvian. There is no room for me to house a research assistant, should I wish to have one, so I have to resist all entreaties from the marvellous keen young people who would love to come to work for me or many other hon. Members. It is a good job we do not have the same leeway as the United States Congress, which I visited in 1989, where Congress members are restricted to no more than 17 assistants. If we introduced such a rule in this place, it would really put the cat among the pigeons.

It is tempting to believe—I am looking at my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning as I say this—that there is a conspiracy abroad to ensure that Back-Bench Members are prevented from doing their job properly. However, as my hon. Friend has spent a long time on the Back Benches, I am sure that he is not a party to it and that he will try to disabuse me of such a traitorous notion when he replies.

What can be done about this? Various efforts were made in the 1970s. For example, Norman Shaw North, where my secretary works, was occupied by the House in 1975 and much of it was restored to a respectable standard. Norman Shaw South was used by us from 1979. At about the same time, a great deal of work went into drawing up a scheme for the whole of the Whitehall, Bridge street, Canon row site—known as the Casson Conder proposal. It would have cost more than £100 million at 1979 prices and was rightly abandoned as almost one of the first things that the new Government did on taking office in 1979.

The trouble is that not much has happened since. There has been a great deal of talk and consultation, but precious little in the way of results. Throughout the 1980s, all that we managed to acquire was space for 30 secretaries, but not a scrap extra for hon. Members. In a Palace where about 2,000 people work, that is pathetic and I for one am losing patience.

I will go through some of the schemes. When the Casson Conder scheme was abandoned in 1979, the Department of the Environment commissioned three separate reports, one after the other, all designed to discover whether it was possible to marry private money and private effort with public money and public effort, and whether that would do the trick.

At last, in 1984, the phase 1 design brief was produced. Why it should take five years to get from a decision to a design brief I do not know, but I am not asking my hon. Friend the Minister to explain all the past decisions for which he does not have responsibility—I am simply

putting on record the mess that we have had until now. The contractor is Faircloughs and I gather that the cost of the scheme will be at least £30 million. It will house 60 Members and 100 secretaries. It should have been ready in 1990, but it was not.

Mr. David Shaw: Has it occurred to my hon. Friend that there is an imbalance between the number of Members and the number of secretaries? She said earlier that her secretary is in a separate building. My secretary is four floors beneath where I operate. That makes it impossible for there to be any computer networking whereby her computer can be connected to my computer or for us to be connected by any modern electronic work facilities. Is that not inconvenient for hon. Members and will not even the new building, costing what it does, perpetuate the existing shortcomings?

Mrs. Currie: We could probably have a long debate—and perhaps we will when my hon. Friend catches your eye, Mr. Speaker—about exactly what services should be available to Members. I think that we should have access to faxes and computer links. We should have closed circuit television. We should have a dish on the roof, and I have said so, so that we can receive the television services that our constituents receive. We should have a cable system, and the quicker the better. This place is still in the 19th century.

While I am complaining, I should add one word of considerable gratitude to whomever it was—it may have been the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)—who stole half the gents' loo in the Library Corridor and turned it into a nice ladies' room. The ladies of this House are extremely grateful.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Will my hon. Friend alert my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) to the fact that the electronic mail system is not dependent on which floor one's secretary happens to be on or underneath? As a sexist comment, I would rather the two were reversed in any case.

Mrs. Currie: It depends whether one has a male secretary or a female secretary.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I should like to correct the hon. Lady about the ladies' toilet. I was not aware that the gentlemen's toilets in the Library Corridor were to be halved until I returned from a break. With all due respect to lady Members, there are not so many lady Members as male Members. If they were to walk the other way down the corridor, there is a ladies' room that I did not know about until I was invited in to see it. It has a bathroom, a shower and a lovely lounge, as well as toilets, and it is only about 10 yards from the corner where the extra facilities have been provided, so I think they are surplus to requirements.

Mrs. Currie: Presumably the hon. Member for Ogmore was taken into that ladies' room by one of his hon. Friends. In fact, it is the Labour ladies' room, and we are only there when we are absolutely desperate. I am pleased that the subject has aroused such interest.

The most irritating thing that struck any lady Member coming to the House for the first time was that the door to the loo in the Library Corridor—the closest one to the Chamber going the usual way—had on it "Members only". There are many stories of lady Members going in there and retreating in great embarrassment; of course, one or two did not retreat in embarrassment. However, the doors are now marked, "Lady Members only" and "Gentlemen Members only". Lady Members, at least on the Conservative side, regard that as a tremendous victory.

I have already mentioned that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport shares the room that I am complaining about. He has put himself on record as saying that ladies need more room than gentlemen. I think that I should refer the hon. Member for Ogmore to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport, who clearly knows more about the matter than I do.

To return to the design brief produced for phase 1 in 1984, we have seen the building and it looks magnificent. I gather that it has cost some £30 million and that it should have been ready in 1990. I was informed by the Clerk to the Select Committee that it would be ready during the summer recess this year. I asked about it again yesterday. The Department of the Environment assured me that it would be ready in October 1991. Occasionally we see the figure of a workman passing backwards and forwards in front of a naked light bulb. Sure as heck, it does not look ready to me. Perhaps my hon. Friend can enlighten us as to when that building will be handed over. Indeed, will it be before not the next general election but the one after? We would regard that, too, as a considerable victory.

In the interim, Canon row police station has been modestly refurbished, and in 1989 it was made available for 30 Members' secretaries. That is it. There was no other change during the whole of the 1980s, and there was no improvement in accommodation for Members.

In May 1989 things began to move at a slightly faster pace. The New Building Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) appointed the architect, Michael Hopkins, to advise on the development of phase 2—that is, Bridge street, Palace chambers and St. Stephen's house. That is still only part of the site. There is another third, which is still a dump, before we get to Richmond house.

Mr. Hopkins had no sooner started work than the Department of Transport and London Underground announced, in July 1989, the extension to the Jubilee line, the replacement and modernisation of Westminster tube station with the new interchange for the Jubilee, District and Circle lines, and the digging up of the whole of Parliament square. When one thinks of the security problems of digging up Parliament square, one's heart turns over.

Quite rightly, hon. Members let out a howl of rage and the Services Committee and various other committees responded with equal anger. London Underground backed off, saying that digging up the centre of the square would no longer be necessary and that the new proposals would be £10 million cheaper. In its report of 14 February 1991, the Services Committee said at paragraph 13:

> "We are particularly pleased that London Underground now accepts that there is no need to use Parliament Square as a work-site, although we are surprised that the engineering solution now put forward was not investigated at a much earlier stage."

I would put it differently—it is a pity London Underground did not think of that in the first place, because we have had another year's delay while London Underground and everyone else have been flapping around, trying to work out how not to dig up the centre of Parliament square when they did not need to.

[Mrs. Currie]

We find that two new private Bills are required to ensure that development of the Jubilee line can take place. I understand that those Bills are in Committee. I am on record already as being highly critical of the whole private Bill procedure in respect of docks, ports and railways. The procedure is a leftover not from the 19th century but from the 18th century.

I am privileged to have been selected to sit in Committee on the Planning and Compensation Bill. Back in the 18th century, the way promoters got private Bills through was to bribe everyone. That might have worked then, but—naturally—compensation clauses have no such role now and will have no such effect. The point is that we should not have to go through private Bill procedures which take years, which keep hon. Members in Committee for hours and days and months and years, and which end up subsidising the legal profession.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who is sitting on the Front Bench, chaired one private Bill Committee for two and a half years and grew grey in the service of the House. *[Interruption.]* It had nothing to do with his constituency—it was connected with King's Cross. The whole system is barmy, so I welcome the efforts of the Leader of the House, under pressure from many hon. Members on both sides, to get shot of the whole procedure and to use the planning system instead.

Although the private Bills in relation to London Transport are expected to complete their passage through the House, with Royal Assent expected in the summer of 1992, which is not very long given the saga of private Bill procedure, the architects for phase 2 have not yet been commissioned, and the whole complicated scheme is still at the feasibility study stage.

The Services Committee promised in September 1990 that the architects' brief would be ready for Easter—that is, next week—but we see no sign of it. I hope that the hon. Member for Ogmore will catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. He certainly has my permission to do so. We should like to know where the brief is and when it will be produced.

What we shall have on Thursday of this week is an exhibition, based on Mr. Hopkins' suggestions. The House will have an opportunity to examine them. I think that I have seen them. Certainly I saw quite a lot of interesting drawings and computer printouts last night. I hope that I have not broken any protocols of the House, but in order to speak with a little knowledge on the subject I took the opportunity to see Mr. Hopkins.

From what I saw, the proposals are splendid, and I hope that no one raises any spurious objections to them. I hope that no one comes up with something which is thought essential. It reminds me of the way we used to build hospitals, or end up not building them. Everyone was invited to make a contribution, plans were produced, everyone was invited to comment and all the comments were taken on board. Of course, they were always contradictory, so we had to go back and produce more briefs, more feasibility studies and more space audits, and there was more delay.

Mr. David Shaw: My hon. Friend has referred to various plans and ideas, and the developments of the past 10 years, which have provided new accommodation for just 30 secretaries and none for Members. Will she consider what might have happened if the management of the House of Commons had been different and if we had had a chief executive, a proposal now being talked of? A chief executive would have had drive, energy and purpose, and his or her sole raison d'être would have been to ensure that the interests of Members were better looked after from an administrative point of view.

Mrs. Currie: I could not agree more. In fact, as I look at you, Mr. Speaker, with your experience and service to this House, it occurs to me that, much as we all regret your retirement at the end of this Parliament, you would be ideal as the chief executive. I agree with my hon. Friend that someone has to do it—someone who knows how the place works, and has a commitment and an affection for it and for all its foibles and quirks, someone who has in his head a brain and in his heart some sense. I commend that suggestion to the House.

However, it is not merely a question of delays at Services Committee level. There is a gap between the Property Services Agency, the Department of the Environment, our asperations and the Treasury. I understand that only £20 million is provided each year for all work on parliamentary buildings, for the entire Palace of Westminster—this magnificent national masterpiece.

Phase 2 will cost £60 million, which is believed to be phased over about three years and means a doubling of the budget. I understand that the DOE has not yet told the Treasury officially about that expenditure and will have to do so to get approval in principle to start design work. We are only a year away from Royal Assent and we have yet to tell the Treasury. I asked a question yesterday and was told that my hon. Friend the Minister, or one of his colleagues on the Front Bench, will write to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury "any time now". Really—when and when can we expect some sort of reply?

That means that no real action is possible until 1992. According to the Committee, demolition and re-build will take three years, although London Underground said—it was quoted in the Select Committee report of 14 February 1991—that it would take 53 months from Royal Assent. So it will be 1995 at the earliest before this additional accommodation will become available—12 years after I entered the House.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has thought about the possibility that a good, economic way to ensure that less staff want to take up accommodation within the Palace of Westminster would be to tell hon. Members that they could either have an office for their staff in London or be given a higher allowance to accommodate their staff elsewhere? In South Dorset I pay for an office for two people out of my allowance and I have to pay extra for my telephone bills because I use the private telephone there rather than the free telephone service here. My hon. Friend might like to expand on that interesting idea.

Mrs. Currie: I do not wish to set out rules for the way in which colleagues on either side of the House work. My system, in a large constituency, is that four staff work for me. One of them must be here, because so many telephone calls come here, this is one of our addresses and there has to be someone here to open the mail. If I may give my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) a clue, in the weeks after I left the Government I received what might be called a rather enlarged postbag. We used to get

three postbags a day and it took eight hours to open the letters. We had to bring someone else in—a research assistant who works for another colleague—and pay him, on an hourly basis, to open them. It only occurred to us afterwards that we should have saved all the stamps. Much of that sort of mail comes here and it would be a burden on the Post Office staff if it had to be sent elsewhere.

Of the three other people who work for me, one works at her home in London and two work in my constituency. I keep them all incredibly busy.

I wish that the allowance would be increased and I have expressed that wish in the House. It is appalling that we are obliged to pay our staff pathetically low rates, whether here or in our constituencies, because we would otherwise have to subsidise their pay substantially out of our own pockets.

Mr. David Shaw: One of the questions that seems to follow from that is that, while we might all want to restrict staff in central London—a policy suggested by Governments in the past and by the Greater London council in its day—considering the amount of legislation that passes through the House, which now amounts to about 40 Bills a year, together with European legislation, is it not reasonable that we might begin to approach the staff level that Congressmen employ, although we would be a long way short of that? Sooner or later each of us will need to have some sort of legislative assistant, who will probably spend a large amount of time helping us to keep track of the details of European legislation.

Mrs. Currie: I invite my hon. Friend to join us tomorrow in European Standing Committee A, where we deal with an extraordinary range of subjects week by week —European Standing Committee B meets at the same time —as he would find that his point is well made. If we are to keep up with all that, as many of us sincerely try to do, a little help must be on the cards at some stage. However, I always find that when I take on a research assistant I end up doing a lot of the work, especially if it is a young person. I end up looking after them, rather than them looking after me, so I have tended to reject that approach.

Since we have a fair amount of time for this Adjournment debate, I am more than content for colleagues from both sides of the House to comment if they wish to catch your eye at some stage, Mr. Speaker. We may as well use this opportunity to make the arguments that we want to make. We do not often get such a chance, and I for one am making the most of it.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am sorry that I missed the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech. While I have been in the Chamber, she has been talking about accommodation for Members and the staff we employ. Are there not two other aspects to that debate? Since we have time, they should be explored further.

First, hon. Members receive a fair number of visitors from our constituencies or elsewhere. At present, we have to meet them in Central Lobby. Sometimes we can take them into some of the corridors. If we are lucky, we can buy them a cup of tea or coffee downstairs in the cafeteria. Accommodation, especially for confidential talks with constituents or visitors, is very limited. If 40 hon. Members each decided to give one constituent a drink in the Pugin Room or coffee in the cafeteria, that would be it—they would be packed. My hon. Friend should perhaps explore that subject.

The second matter that my hon. Friend might care to explore—as an indication of my admiration for her, may I say that I am sure that this must have occurred to her —is that, from time to time, hon. Members have to give television interviews, perhaps on days such as today when we have heard the Budget statement. At the moment we usually have to stand on one of the greens—Palace green, College green or outside the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. Our lives have been affected by security measures taken since January and the outbreak of the war in the Gulf. Yet we are sitting ducks for terrorist attack, or any other attack, while we are giving television interviews. Should not the plans that we are making for accommodation in the House take account of hon. Members' security when giving television interviews? Would my hon. Friend care to develop that issue?

Mrs. Currie: May I answer my hon. Friend in reverse order? I agree that it is not an affectation or a conceit to ask that accommodation be made availble which is suitable for television studios. We are often required to give interviews—typically, one is asked to do so at some stage every week—and it is not merely Ministers but also Back Benchers. We think that that is a good idea. My hon. Friend's argument about security was well made. The studios available for such interviews are tiny—much too small for group discussions and only suitable for head-to-camera commentary. That is not satisfactory.

In his first comment, my hon. Friend reiterated what I said in my earliest remarks today. Perhaps he may like to do as I do: I show our rooms to those constituents whom I trust most deeply and especially local journalists whom I trust absolutely, and never again do they believe that we do not work hard. From then on they believe that we work in the most diabolical conditions, and they tend to admire us that much more whenever we manage to get anything done for them which requires us to sit down and write a letter, dictate a draft, or whatever.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): We do work in diabolical conditions, and I concur with the hon. Lady's central point. The essence of her argument is about the new building and the need for expansion. Is not the key issue the use of existing premises? I spent three and a half years—courtesy of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)—in the Cloisters. I recently escaped and now share a room with another Member, which is positive luxury. I question the way in which the House has organised itself around bars and restaurants, of which I believe we have 21, or probably more. Do we need them? Would it not make more appropriate use of the establishment to convert the bars and restaurants into offices for hon. Members? Like the hon. lady, I regularly take my constituents down to the Cloisters for them to see the appalling conditions in which we work. They do not believe the conditions in which I worked for three and a half years. Should we not examine our use of existing premises before we consider the new proposals?

Mrs. Currie: I have known the hon. Gentleman for a long time and have had many late-night debates with him. We have 23 bars and restaurants. He will understand if I say with great affection that if I want to find him, I know where to look. Because of the way we work, we need facilities for refreshments—literally for refreshment even if it is beans on toast or whatever the Prime Minister eats these days, because we are here at strange hours. It would

[Mrs. Currie]

not be safe for my colleagues—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson)—to wander the streets around Victoria at 2 am to find something to eat. We might find more than we bargained for. We must have facilities on the premises.

When I first entered the House I, too, had a desk in the Cloisters, which I shared with 15 colleagues. What bothered me most was the absolute lack of privacy. Although I trusted my colleagues, I was bothered by the fact that on my wedding anniversary, which is on 1 July, when my husband sent me a bouquet of red roses the gossip columnists immediately wanted to know who had sent me roses. They were not satisfied with the explanation that it was a chap to whom I had been married for rather a long time. That is what lack of privacy does.

On a serious point, the wise space audit carried out by the Services Committee produced a response from only about 10 per cent. of hon. Members. Most of us bear some responsibility for our poor accommodation because we tend not to moan about it at the right time or in the right way. I have undertaken a lot of correspondence about that and I hope that my points have been taken seriously.

Mr. David Shaw *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: I have been speaking for 40 minutes and I should like to make some progress.

This debate is on phase 2 accommodation and I should like to concentrate a little more on that. Phase 1 will provide space for 60 hon. Members and 100 secretaries. I am not sure about phase 2 because it depends on the feasibility study.

I contrast phase 2 with a building that is under construction in my constituency. The Toyota motor corporation announced in January 1989 that it was looking for a site. It made a decision in April 1989 and then obtained planning permission and compulsory purchase orders. A public inquiry took place and work started on the site in June 1990. At the end of October this year—not "perhaps", but for certain—the building will be finished and handed over to the company by Laing, the contractor. That is just two and a half years from decision to completion. The factory will cost £200 million, not £20 million or £60 million. The entire project will cost about £700 million, which is more than 10 times the cost of phase 2, but it will be completed in half the time. If there is an argument for the abolition of the Property Services Agency, that is it. If a company from overseas, which has never been to this country before, can build a new factory to time—in fact, slightly ahead of time—I fail to see why we, with our familiarity with and knowledge of every nook and cranny of these buildings, should take so long.

It never used to matter that we had no accommodation. Hon. Members would attend to their private concerns in the morning, stroll in for Question Time at half-past two and perhaps even do a little debating before toddling off to their clubs in the evening. One or two colleagues probably still do that. In those days, there were very few letters to deal with. Constituents were delighted to see the Member of Parliament about once a year, when the town band and the mayor in a top-hat would turn up at the railway halt to welcome him on his annual visit—it was always a he—but it is no longer like that, especially since the advent of television in the House.

I do not serve a handful of electors—I serve 83,000, covering an area of 120 square miles of south Derbyshire. I receive about 200 letters and other items of mail a week—that is in a normal week, when I am not busy doing something controversial. Most of my constituents have a telephone and use it, and many—more every week—have a fax and use that too. They all expect and deserve prompt, courteous and efficient responses and methods of handling what they want me to do—and so long as I represent the people of south Derbyshire, they will get it.

Please, could I have some more room in which to do my job properly, and as quickly as possible?

8.45 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): It is a pleasure to reply to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). Clearly, she has been better briefed by the civil servants than I, as the Chairman of the New Building Sub-Committee, have been. I shall take that up with them in due course. I hope that there has been no briefing over and above what the Services Committee has already received, because you for one, Mr. Speaker, would soon be telling members of Select Committees that they should not disclose information until it has been reported to the House. The hon. Lady was no doubt able to acquire much information as a result of her experience as a Minister. I am reluctant to put egg on her face—to coin a phrase—but her criticism is unjustified, especially when one considers the history of the new building in phase 1, in particular, and the distinguished Members who served on the Committee to get it established.

The hon. Lady was elected to the House in 1983 and was a PPS to the Secretary of State for Education and Science in 1985-86, with all the perks that that might have afforded her. After three years in the House, she became Under-Secretary of State for Social Security in 1986. No doubt she then had spacious accommodation and plenty of secretaries and plenty of help to open her sacks of letters.

Mrs. Currie: The only privilege or perk of being PPS to Lord Joseph was the honour of serving such a marvellous and distinguished man of whom I am very fond. Our rooms were no better. As for my time as a Minister, my room was then in the Star Chamber. The only advantage was that I did not have to share it, but it was roughly the same size as the room that I have now.

Mr. Powell: That remark surprises me. I have been to most Ministers' rooms in the House and they seem spacious to me. The hon. Lady must have been very unsuccessful in the allocation of accommodation.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): She is an ex-Minister.

Mr. Powell: Yes, she is an ex-Minister. The hon. Lady has especially overlooked the problems of Back Benchers. She is now born again as a Back Bencher and she has found out the difficulties that we face. As a Back Bencher myself, I face them.

The hon. Lady referred to the delays. I do not know whether she is listening. She opened this Adjournment debate and I should have thought that she would be interested to hear the answers to the problems. Perhaps she knows them already. When she referred to the delays, she, above all, should have recognised the service of hon. Members who have served on the New Building

Sub-Committee. A design brief for phase 1 was accepted in 1984 under the excellent chairmanship of the late John Silkin, who spent many hours on the design brief and who had to cope with the difficulties of negotiating the funding of the project with Ministers. As an ex-Minister, the hon. Lady will know that getting the funding, even for Parliament itself, is far more difficult than designing the building or getting it built.

In November 1987, the New Building Sub-Committee was set up. I put on record my appreciation of all the hon. Members who constantly attended meetings not once every three months, or once every month, but every Tuesday. The purpose of the exercise was to get on with the building. All hon. Members who have served on the Sub-Committee since 1987 have been regular attenders despite their other onerous duties. Some of them, for example, have been Whips. Recognition of their devotion to the project and to the development of phase 2 should be placed on the record. I have had the privilege to be the Chairman of the Committee. Only as a result of the efforts of the Committee shall we see phase 1 being developed and allocated to hon. Members this summer. Hon. Members will be given accommodation there when we return in October after the summer recess. That is undoubtedly wholly due to the efforts that members of the Sub-Committee have put into the project.

The Sub-Committee has produced four reports since 1987. The first deals with the reasons for the delay on phase 1. I am rather surprised to find that the hon. Lady was not in the Chamber during the debate on that report to make the comments that she has made now. Perhaps she was busy then as a Minister. We have twice presented reports to the House on the Jubilee line proposal, which delayed the development of phase 2 and could have delayed further development of phase 1. We presented the fourth report on the phase 2 proposals.

You, Mr. Speaker, and the Commission engaged Sir Robin Ibbs who produced an excellent report for the House on all accommodation. I put on record the fact that Sir Robin enjoyed the job. However, although he enjoyed coming to the House and making his report, he was not paid for his services. Sir Robin is a busy man. He gave his time and energy to prepare the report, with the help of all the staff in the House, and it will be useful as a source of reference not only for the New Building Sub-Committee, but for other Committees of the House. I am sure that everyone in the House would want to pay tribute to him and to his committee for their efforts.

I am aware that the Minister for Housing and Planning may reply to the debate and I do not want to take the ground from under him. However, I want to explain what I think the next steps should be.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The Minister was a member of the Committee.

Mr. Powell: Yes, the Minister was a member of the Committee.

I fully understand the hon. Lady's impatience with the slow rate of progress to date—indeed, I and my colleagues fully share that impatience. I hope that we can now make more rapid progress. Most hon. Members will be aware that phase 1 will open during the forthcoming summer recess. The infuriating delays that have bedevilled the work on site now seem to be over. We can look forward to moving into a splendid building. It will provide 160 extra desks for hon. Members and their staff. There will be new catering facilities, major new accommodation for the Library and much more besides. Many new offices for Members will be provided within the Palace as a result of other hon. Members moving into phase 1. I understand that about 95 places will become available within the accommodation of the House.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, the time when we discovered that there were 25 rooms above your spacious accommodation in the Speaker's House. They will become available as a result of your inquisitiveness to find out what was going on above your head.

Mrs. Currie: My ears are pricking. Are we given to understand that the rooms above the Speaker's House will be available to hon. Members? If so, may I put my name down?

Mr. Dixon: Yes to the first question, no to the second.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) said that the answer to the first question was yes and the answer to the second was no. The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee examined the matter and said that the accommodation should be only for hon. Members because it was above the Speaker's House. You, Mr. Speaker, would not want a cabaret going on upstairs while you where trying to sleep. The rooms were found and the New Building Sub-Committee, the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee and the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) made arrangements to provide access to them. They will eventually come on stream for new hon. Members.

The problems were not only finding the rooms and organising the space audit, which the Committee pressurised everyone to complete. Thanks to the Serjeant at Arms and his staff, the accommodation audit was carried out, although it took some months. It may interest the hon. Lady to know that it is the first space audit of the Palace of Westminster since it was built. At least our weekly meetings are turning up much accommodation that might otherwise have been overlooked.

As for phase 2, much has been happening behind the scenes. In two reports to the House over the past 12 months, the Services Committee has described complicated negotiations with London Underground Limited about the future of the Bridge street site. That has taken up much of the Committee's time since the Government presented the Jubilee line scheme two years ago. The latest proposals represent an excellent deal for the House. The plan to dig up Parliament square and use it as a work site for five years has been dropped, largely because of pressure from the New Building Sub-Committee. The Government have promised that funds will be forthcoming for a concrete raft to separate the London Underground works from the parliamentary works.

That crucial decision will enable us to erect a high-quality building, shielded from the noise and vibration of the tube trains that make working in the existing buildings so unpleasant. I used to share an office in St. Stephen's house with my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow; it was all right when the trains were not moving, but once they started we had to move with them, even if we were writing at the time. The design of the phase

[Mr. Powell]

2 building will no doubt benefit from the fact that the architect Michael Hopkins will be responsible for it, and also for that of the new tube station.

Having been initially blown off course by the rather half-baked proposals of London Underground, we are now in a position to co-operate with the company in the development of a finer building than would otherwise have been possible. Perhaps the two-year delay will benefit Parliament: the building above the concrete raft will include five floors which will stretch right across the raft, rather than the original design around the perimeter of Bridge street.

Over the past 12 months, the New Building Sub-Committee has been very active. We have commissioned the first thorough survey of parliamentary accommodation—the so-called audit—which consists of a computerised data base that will enable future accommodation to be planned on a rational and objective basis. The space audit has told us how much space we currently have, how it is to be used and how much of the present accommodation is unfit for its purpose.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South mentioned the Cloisters. I spent some time there. A number of hon. Members who were elected in 1979 were allocated no desks and no offices—not even any space in the Cloisters. We were left to wander the corridors. I remember, Mr. Speaker, asking your predecessor, in 1980, to implement the shops and factories Acts. He said that, although hon. Members passed Acts of Parliament, the law did not cover them. We could not demand the implementation of the law for the benefit of Members of Parliament or their secretaries, because we are a law unto ourselves. We had to beg or borrow a space, sometimes using the desks that were available in the Library and sometimes finding that no desk or chair was available even there.

When I was responsible for allocating accommodation to Labour Members, I offered a desk in the Oratory Room to a new Member in 1987. I told him that it could give him a great deal of publicity, because Charles I's death warrant had been signed in that room. He might appear on the front page of his local newspaper. "May I see the room?" he asked. "Of course," I replied, and I took him down to see it. "Very nice," he said. "I accept; thank you very much." Accordingly, he moved in and was given the expected publicity. He showed me the story on the front page of his local paper, explaining how he had been allocated a space in that historic room. What he did not realise was that three other hon. Members would be joining him in a week or two. He would come to regret having accepted the offer. Thankfully, things are changing now, and it is to be hoped that in the not-too-distant future there will be accommodation for all hon. Members.

I have written to all hon. Members asking for their views on which extra facilities are most acutely needed in the phase 2 building. I have received replies from just under 10 per cent. of my colleagues.

We have also received bids for accommodation from the various organisations and departments represented in the House. On the basis of all that information we have put together a package of proposals for phase 2. The Services Committee will announce its decision in a report to the House which we hope will be published shortly after the Easter recess. You would not expect me, Mr. Speaker, to divulge the contents of a Select Committee's report in advance of its publication. I can only say, wait and see. If, however, our proposals are adopted, we shall be able to achieve the Services Committee's target so that by the time phase 2 is completed, every hon. Member who wants an office shall have one and the overall standard of accommodation for Members of Parliament and their staff will be greatly increased. We hope that then we shall be able to demolish unsightly temporary accommodation such as Portakabins and find new uses for what is at present unsuitable accommodation within the estate. Moreover, we hope to be able to accept the great majority of the bids for phase 2 accommodation.

On Thursday of this week we are to hold an exhibition in Committee Room 7 from 11 am to 5 pm. It will not publicise the Services Committee's final recommendations because they have not yet been reported to the House, but the exhibition will display the current thinking of our architects and give some idea of what might be available in phase 2. The architects ought to be given credit for the advice that they have given not only on phase 2 but on phase 1. If hon. Members take the trouble on Thursday to visit the exhibition, I am sure that they will be suitably impressed. We hope that as many Members of Parliament and staff of the House as possible will see the exhibition.

Once the Services Committee has reported, it will be up to the Government to ensure that progress is maintained. We hope for early acceptance by the Treasury that funding should be made available for phase 2. Our architects can then begin the design work in earnest. Construction work could begin as soon as the London Underground Bill receives Royal Assent—possibly in about 12 months' time. If the political will of Ministers is there for phase 2, it could be completed within three or four years. My Sub-Committee will do its best to ensure that that timetable is achieved.

I could speak at length, but I realise that other hon. Members want to take part in the debate. The chances are that they will want another debate on this important subject. It is an emotive one for those without accommodation. The members of the Services Committee and I are sympathetic. Those of us who now have an office of our own have not always enjoyed one. We appreciate, therefore, the restrictions imposed on certain Members and their staff and believe that proper accommodation ought to be provided for them. It should be possible for them to hold committee meetings in their offices, at which four or five other people could be accommodated. Their secretaries ought to be able to work alongside them. Members ought not to have to walk two or three miles to contact their secretaries. It is high time that Parliament spent money on designing a building in which appropriate facilities are made available for Members of Parliament.

I should like a swimming pool to be provided, as well as accommodation for school children when they visit the House. That would enable us to educate youngsters about parliamentary democracy. Such accommodation is willingly provided in other countries. Other Parliaments pay for visits by school children. Facilities are made available for them so that they can listen to debates. It is essential that this Parliament should provide similar facilities.

The aim of the New Building Sub-Committee and of hon. Members on the Service Committee is, with the

blessing of your Commission, Mr. Speaker, to make progress on the design of phase 2 and to provide accommodation for hon. Members.

9.9 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for speaking in this interesting debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on obtaining it. The hon. Gentleman made a relevant point when he said that, in due course, every hon. Member should have an office, our visitors should be better treated and we should have the facility of Committee Rooms in which we can hold meetings. Those three things would go a long way towards ensuring that the House and its Members are pre-eminent in the world in terms of debate and in maintaining our leadership of many years as the mother of Parliaments and as one of the leading Parliaments, if not the leading one, of the world.

However, we must focus on whether the hon. Gentleman's objectives will be met and consider what pressure we must keep up to ensure that they are met. In the short time that I have been a Member of the House, I have learnt that, unless we keep up the pressure, bureaucracy all too often gets in the way and the administrative procedures ensure either that things do not happen or that objectives take an unduly long period to achieve.

I was elected after working in business and industry, and although I acknowledge that one wants to embrace and quickly take on board many of our traditions that go back hundreds of years, the tradition of poor facilities is not one that we should maintain. It has had its day. There was a time when it was a bit of a joke. There was a time when one could go to one's constituents and say, with a bit of a laugh, "Aren't the conditions that we work in appalling? Aren't you fortunate that we can deal with your mail, get answers out of Ministers for you and have the arrangements for all that?" There were times when hon. Members were proud of the fact that they could use a desk in the Library and did not need a secretary because they could write all their constituency mail by hand.

However, those times are in the past. We live in a competitive world and in a market economy, although not all hon. Members welcome that. In this competitive world, other Parliaments might begin to compete with the mother of Parliaments in the skills of debate and in terms of what facilities they can offer their Members. We need to stay on top of the many issues that need discussion today. This Parliament over the years has discussed issues that relate to many countries. I remind hon. Members of the debates on the Gulf and of the amount of information that was needed when making decisions about weaponry and equipment. All hon. Members suddenly wanted to get to grips with that information.

We also encounter pressures from the media. Because of what is happening in the world today, we are instantly required to be experts on a wide variety of subjects. The days when one could lock oneself away and be an expert only on health or on defence or on any other individual subject have now gone. We must ensure that we have access to a lot of information, and to that end we need not only technology and its facilities available in our own offices, but better facilities for our staff, who should also have access to that information.

It is annoying to find that, although Government Departments issue press releases almost daily on various subjects that interest me or my constituents, I do not yet have the facilities to search a database and to find out what information was released today or yesterday. Instead, one has to telephone the Department and check with the civil servants. That means delay and an inconvenience that is compounded when one has only a limited number of staff and has to carry out much of the research oneself.

However, all those facilities are increasingly available to the outside companies that lobby us. It is infuriating to attend a lobbying company function and to find that its staff are much more on top of the subject and have much more information at their fingertips than is available to hon. Members. When I go to meetings, I want to be able to ask my secretary or a member of my staff to press the buttons on the machine and obtain access to all the relevant information to ensure that I am properly briefed, as I would be if I were in business. When I was in business, information was made available in one way or another.

When I visit colleagues with whom I used to work when I was in business and see their offices and the facilities which my former employers now provide for their staff, I am appalled at how the House of Commons is falling behind day by day and minute by minute in an environment where the electronic age is pushing everything in the outside world that much further forward and at a much faster pace. We must keep up and get on top. If not, the fears of my colleagues that the European Parliament and other parliaments in Europe will move ahead will be realised, because other parliaments will be able to move information and databases forward.

Mrs. Currie: Will my hon. Friend join me in putting on record our appreciation of the House of Commons Library, and its research assistants and staff? They are absolutely first class. Will he add the press to his list of outside organisations that are much better informed on a day-to-day basis than we are? Does he agree that it is astonishing that the most efficient way of finding out what is going on in our constituencies is to phone our local newspapers?

Mr. Shaw: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend on the latter point. It is particularly frustrating when a media organisation gets on the telephone to one and says, "Please can we have a quote on . . ." It may be some subject on which the Ministry has just made the latest announcement or, dare I say, leaked what is to be announced later in the day. One does not have a clue that the announcement was even to be made. There is nothing on a televison screen to tell us.

The other frustrating thing is that, when we are over here in the main Parliament building, we cannot contact our offices except by telephone. We have secretaries working away typing letters, and it would be wonderful if we could go to a computer screen in the Library and go through our secretaries' work on a link line to our offices, which are some yards away. That would be especially useful when voting is taking place.

I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South about the House of Commons Library. We have tremendous access to information and support from the House of Commons Library, but is that resource being used in a sensible way? If I step back and look at the matter almost as a management consultant would, I notice

[Mr. Shaw]

that we have some talented people in the Library who should often be used for intellectual research and the product of the research rather than for our mundane inquiries. Sometimes such people have to deal with our mundane inquiries because we do not have access in our offices to basic computer searching facilities to enable us to search databases ourselves.

The office programme should be designed to enable us to compete with the outside business world, the people who lobby us, the media, and the European Parliament. We must keep the British Parliament ahead of the field. We want this Parliament to continue to be a centre for intellectual debate which is ahead of the field and the rest of the world.

In the few years that I have been in Parliament, I have had visitors from the eastern bloc, several Soviet republics and the United States. They were all full of admiration for the intellectual debate which goes on in this Parliament and the way in which we have stayed ahead of the field over the years. But they would be shocked if they knew that we were likely to fall behind them as they developed. They will have the advantage of developing with all the new technology. They will take on all the latest facilities. They will ensure that any new buildings in their Parliaments are wired with the latest optical fibres and other technologies which will enable them to keep ahead. It is important that we should keep ahead in intellectual debate.

We should keep ahead in representing democracy and in making sure that Parliament does more to encourage visitors. A number of hon. Members have mentioned schoolchildren and others visiting the Palace of Westminster. It is essential that we have adequate facilities and that we can offer people refreshments. Visitors from my local disabled groups have come to Westminster. I was quite impressed by our facilities for the disabled, but there are no facilities for giving a cup of tea afterwards to people who have gone around the House of Commons in their wheelchairs. Here they are, having struggled round the building and enjoyed their visit, unable to sit down and have refreshments at the end.

Nor do we have enough Committee or other rooms in which to meet people when we cannot leave the House because of debates. We must have more meeting facilities.

As a new Member, I have been rather fortunate in securing an office in Norman Shaw, North, because it is one of our better buildings and has better office provision. Yet the carpets are a little dowdy, there is dust and goodness knows how many little bugs which have been floating around for years, and one feels that there has never been a breath of fresh air in the building for some time. The paintwork is not regularly renewed. It does not give the impression of being a working environment in a modern age.

There is also a tremendous waste of space which will have to be addressed at some stage: neither the corridors nor the arrangement of the building are very modern. There is also a central courtyard which is a total waste of space. It may be that the outside of the building must be preserved for architectural reasons, but there are many buildings in the City of London whose centres have been modernised; the offices are open-plan, and an atrium and airy, light spaces have been introduced. The natural lighting in the Norman Shaw, North offices is appalling, and we rely on neon lighting which in many offices today might be questioned as being bad for the eyes.

When I read of office stress and strain and all the other conditions which are being investigated these days by the private sector, I feel that our staff are getting a raw deal, because it will be a long time before we can offer them the sort of health protection that is offered by the private sector. We must address these subjects. We cannot go on having debates and discussions like this in the year 2000 and beyond. It is just not good enough to continue for that length of time without doing something about these things.

I have mentioned in outline information facilities and access to databases, networking systems and other such things. We must accept the truth of the old saying "Information is power". I am not a great one for the conspiracy theory, but it has been suggested to me that it applies here—that it suits the Government to keep hon. Members in the dark, to keep them away from some of the information facilities and to deny them access to some of the modern technology which will enable us to get up speed and be able to compete with Government and Ministers on what is happening in the world outside, and will ensure that questions and debate in the Chamber are of the highest possible standard and quality.

I would suggest to any Minister who might be tempted down that path that it is in the interests of us all, whether in government or out of it, to have the highest possible standard of debate in the Chamber, to make sure that, when foreign visitors come here, they will still feel that the British Parliament is the leading parliament in the world and will continue to be so.

That is why we must make sure that we have complete access to all the information facilities now available, whether commercial, Government or departmental databases. The most modern facilities should be available in the offices of the future that hon. Members will occupy.

The internal mail facilities in this building need examining. It is wonderful for us to have at our disposal the services of the great British Post Office. All the traditions of that great institution are brought to bear as our mail is cared for. I understand that certain aspects of Mr. Speaker's mail receive special attention, but we are hidebound with tradition, even in such modern matters as the mail, and a special stamp must be affixed to all envelopes that appear on the Members' letter board. I accept that many of these facilities have style and have existed for many years.

When I visit a friend in Congress in the United States, I see that his mail is delivered each morning to his personal letter box at the door of his office. His secretary does not have to queue at the Congress post office for his letters. Our secretaries make a detour—it can take up to 20 minutes—going to our post office and queueing for our mail. Consider the time, not just in money, wasted by our secretaries undertaking such activities, when they should be answering queries from our constituents and dealing with administrative and other matters. I urge the authorities of the House to examine our internal mail arrangements, at least in the hope that the mail can be delivered directly to our secretaries' desks and offices.

We must review the maintenance and decoration of public buildings, new and old, in an aggressive way. The trouble with Government accounting, for the schools and hospitals in our constituencies and so on—I speak as an accountant who worked in the private sector, and my

remarks apply to all Government buildings, including the Palace of Westminster—is that proper provision is not made for maintenance and depreciation because we do so much on a cash accounting rather than on an accruals accounting basis. The result is that, when the time comes for cash to be spent on maintenance and repairs, we discover that there is something better to spend it on, that the country cannot afford it, or that public expenditure is too tight at that time for the money to be spent in that way.

Our public buildings must be regularly decorated. Curtains in our offices should be taken down at least annually and properly cleaned to remove the dust and modern bugs that scientists seem to be discovering almost weekly. Only by those means shall we ensure that we and our staff work in a healthy environment. That may lead us in the future to be more efficient and productive. It will also help to keep this place in the forefront of the world's parliament buildings.

9.27 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am happy to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), and I begin where he left off, on the important issue of the general appearance of this place. Hon. Members will not forget their first visit to this building. I was a young lad up from the west country who sat in the public gallery and looked round in wonderment. My local MP asked me to join him for tea, but I was too shy to accept. I was left with the impression of a building in marvellous condition. I speak of the time not long after it was rebuilt following the blitz. The stairways, for example, were in excellent condition, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Dover was right to say that it is now in places decidedly grotty.

This debate provides a valuable opportunity for those who care deeply about this building and institution—of course, the institution is wider than the building—to review the state of affairs here, and we are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) for initiating the debate. I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), the Chairman of the New Building Sub-Committee, for the difficult work that the Committee does. I thank him for bringing us up to date on the plans for stage 2. We hope that the opening of stage 1 is imminent.

We can all be critical. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South was critical of the length of time that it takes to get anything done in this place. The parliamentary estate—what a horrible expression—is one of the most sensitive areas in the whole of London. No one knows better than you, Mr. Speaker, that nobody can do anything here without consulting many people. A great number of people are involved in the work, and many bodies outside—not least, English Heritage—are very concerned about any alteration, however small. There are all sorts of restraints and contraints on the work of improving the lot of the thousands of people who work—indeed, almost live—in these buildings.

One thinks, above all, of the malevolent influence and attitude of the Treasury from time to time. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, like me, remember the very ambitious plans that were produced many years ago for the site we are now discussing. I think that the building was called the bird-cage because of its aviary-type top. We all remember how, one Budget day, the Chancellor of the Exchequer killed that project at a stroke. The Government of the day had to cut public expenditure, and the bad conditions in which Members of Parliament had to work continued.

Tributes have been paid to the many people who have done their best to improve our conditions. I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to pay a tribute—one with which the House will want to be associated—to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who, in his year or so as Leader of the House of Commons, did his utmost to improve conditions. I had the pleasure of being my right hon. and learned Friend's Parliamentary Private Secretary. Having made that very swift transition one July day from the Foreign Office to this building, the Leader of the House decided, in his usual thorough manner, to go on a very extensive tour. We went to Old Palace Yard and to St. Stephen's house, which is still rattled by the trains. I have fond memories of the reaction of the hon. Member for Ogmore. My right hon. and learned Friend was absolutely shocked at the conditions in which some members of our staff, particularly secretaries, work. The conditions really are appalling. Perhaps I may enter a plea for my secretary, who still works in St. Stephen's house. I hope that she will get accommodation in phase 1 of the new building, which should open after the summer recess. I do not make any special plea for myself.

Harsh words have been said about conditions in the Cloisters. When I became a Member of Parliament I asked that I should be allowed to go to the Cloisters. I have spent 27 or 28 years here. The first 19 years were spent in the Press Gallery, and for the remainder, after service in the European Parliament, I have been a Member. Having decided that I wanted to go to the Cloisters, I sought out the good Miss Frampton, who will be remembered well, and put my request to her. The request was granted. Of course, that place would not be everybody's choice. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South, I was not sent red roses.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), who also has a desk in the Cloisters, will bear me out when I say that they have one merit above all others—their convenience for getting to the Chamber. One could hardly be nearer the Chamber. Admittedly, other Members sometimes speak rather loudly—not, I hasten to add, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West, whose desk is two down from mine—and there is certainly no privacy, but the place has a certain charm and I should be happy to spend the rest of my parliamentary life there.

The new building will relieve some of the pressure for space, so I make a plea that when it comes into service we be given a little more space in the Cloisters, which are after all no more than a converted corridor. Given a little more space, I shall be perfectly happy to stay there.

Hon. Members have mentioned other people who work in this building and the conditions in which they have their being—our secretaries, for instance. I should like to mention the Press Gallery. The number of journalists working there has exploded in recent years, because of the televising of the House, local radio and the general growth of the lobby. Numbers have increased dramatically since I arrived in the gallery in 1961. It has tripled in size, and that has put pressure on press refreshment facilities and especially on the writing rooms. People are jammed in, and

[Mr. David Harris]

their position has not been eased by the advent of the new technology which was much lauded by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover.

Speaking of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, I should add that databases, computers and all the machines that I have no intention of ever mastering are doubtless important to some hon. Members. The fact is that we all want something different from the House of Commons and the services that it provides. So I was glad to read in the third report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), prepared by the Sub-Committee presided over by the hon. Member for Ogmore, the following sentence. Referring to the space audit about which the hon. Member for Ogmore enlightened us, it said:

"We are not seeking to establish a single uniform standard of accommodation."

That is right and proper. We all want different sorts of accommodation. Many of us are perfectly happy in the Cloisters; others have different requirements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South is one of those who need more space, privacy and staff. No doubt she has research assistants. I do not want one—they are anathema to me. But I am not criticising my hon. Friend——

Mrs. Currie: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I agree with it, apart from two points. First, there ought to be some minimum standards here which are at least related to the laws that affect the rest of the nation. Secondly, I should like not just more room and space but a window.

Mr. Harris: I am sure that my hon. Friend will have a window, if not more space. She is right of course. The Select Committee report went on to say:

"We do however think it desirable to establish a basic minimum standard which, if approved by the House, could become the bench mark for future planning"—

the very point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South.

I treasure the memory of my former colleague, Enoch Powell, sitting at a desk in the Library answering his correspondence with a dipped pen. Some colleagues still do that and there should be a place for it. Perhaps some of them use fountain or ball-point pen—a method eschewed by my former colleague. Equally, there should be a place for the needs and aspirations of Members. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Dover is into computers, word processors and all that fancy equipment in a big way. The House should try to accommodate Members' different styles of working.

One of the fascinating aspects of this place is that there is no set way to approach the remarkable job of being a Member of Parliament. No one, thank goodness, has tried to produce a manual on it. We all work differently, according to our upbringing, training and constituencies. The pressure on Members varies according to whether we are full time—I do not criticise those who are not. The strength of the House is its diversity, but that produces problems for those who manage and run it.

During my five years as a Member of the European Parliament, my colleagues and I had offices that we refused to occupy because we felt that the Mayor of Strasbourg, Pierre Pflimlin, was attemping to cement the European Parliament to Strasbourg. A great building was constructed there, without parliamentary approval, and made available to us. The offices contained a shower and a couch and were quite palatial, but I was there for only one week a month. My office would have made most Members of this House green with envy, but I hope that we shall never reach that position here.

I not only cherish the memory of Enoch Powell working in the Library, but when I go there I delight in seeing some of my colleagues still working there—often by choice—because that is the way it should be. We do not want uniformity but better standards, especially for our staff and those of our colleagues who require them. We want better facilities for the many people who serve the House and work in it, perhaps not directly for Members of Parliament.

Some Opposition Members have made the case on behalf of the catering staff. They have described the conditions in which they must work and the paucity of their rest facilities. They work terrifically long hours, especially when the House sits late, and deserve proper facilities.

The debate has been well worth while. I hope that it will spur on all those who have been wrestling with the accommodation problem for many years to make even greater efforts. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South is right to say that we should make faster progress, but we are getting there. Some of us are happy to be self-sacrificing and say, "You have your fine office. We are content with ours in the crowded Cloisters".

9.43 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): It is difficult for Parliament to get it right, not only because of the differing needs and views expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who sits in front of me in the Cloisters, and for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), but also because it is a question of housing. It is perhaps appropriate that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will answer the debate. I say that quite seriously. I was recently in Romania, where, as we know, the dictator, the Parliament and all the authorities built themselves truly massive palaces, which would doubtless fulfil all the requirements of the endless reports that have been produced about services in this place. But when I went to Romania, I was ashamed that the people had not turned all the palaces into houses for the poor immediately after the revolution. In terms of civilisation and care of our own people, we are a million miles from Romania. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a point to be made.

I understand that we are already the most expensive Parliament in the world, and we sit the longest hours by far. The next Parliament down the list sits only half the hours that we do and the next one down, half the hours again. We are enormously expensive in terms of staff. I have worked in many areas of the world, in many different offices and in countries with different cultures and styles of economy. Never in my life have I been as well looked after personally as I am here. In my working experience, the service that we receive from all the staff, with their different responsibilities, titles and tasks, is truly unique.

There is simply nothing like it anywhere else. We talk about Congress. The messengers in Congress are youngsters—dressed up and running around. I am amazed that they ever arrive. Presumably it is only their keenness

and enthusiasm that get them there. How far removed they are from the stately dignity of our highly intelligent badge messengers. When one hears our messengers talking about the very framework of the building, as they do each morning, one realises their great knowledge and love of the Palace of Westminster.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) referred to catering facilities. Never in my life have I been able to walk into any one of a number of restaurants and cafeterias at my place of work at 3 am and get the sort of breakfast I want.

This is a truly remarkable place. Would that all the library facilities in the United Kingdom could match the level of service that we are offered. I am proud that I can sit in the Library and do my work on behalf of my constituents. The facilities are truly remarkable, not just because of the intelligence of those who serve us from behind the counters, but because of the enormously varied service that they provide, ranging from providing us with daily or weekly papers to bringing to us any book that we care to name. The service is unique in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives referred to our desks in the Cloisters, but failed to mention one important point. It is true that we sit in a passage and that it is sometimes difficult. The police walk through, reminding us to vote, and that is a helpful service, but everyone else also seems to walk through, including secretaries and colleagues. Nevertheless, it is an extraordinary feeling when one looks up at the vaulted ceiling in the middle of the night and remembers that, with the exception of Westminster hall, the Cloisters are perhaps the oldest part of the House—the passageway through which Princess Elizabeth walked when she was concerned about the possibility of her sister executing her. This is an historic place, of truly great proportions both physically and because of its uniqueness.

I heartily support and praise the way in which the building has been adapted in an extraordinary variety of ways to meet some of the needs of a modern Member of Parliament. In the Cloisters, my hon. Friend and I have no privacy for our telephone calls. My desk is still labelled "Enoch Powell". I sometimes wonder exactly who I am. I took out the "Iain Macleod" label. It was a toss-up as to which eminent former Member of Parliament I should attempt to copy. Perhaps it was Mr. Macleod, who I knew the better of the two, and whose philosophy I probably share.

It is tough that we cannot have a private telephone conversation. It is difficult to have a tiny desk that cannot hope to contain the amount of mail that pours to us through the Post Office three, four or five times a day. However, in that old Cloisters, that historic place, there is the knowledge that we are just part of a long procession of Members of Parliament serving the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Currie: I am intrigued by the fact that my hon. Friend's desk in the Cloisters has Enoch Powell's name on it. Her experience is similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who was at school with me in Liverpool. On one occasion he found that the schooldesk that he was sitting at had carved on its lid the name "Arthur Askey".

Does my hon. Friend think that perhaps the appalling working conditions in the Cloisters could be one reason why that distinguished gentleman Mr. Powell was driven to work in the Library? It is certainly something that drove me to work in the Library. Unfortunately, there are nowhere near enough desks in the Library to accommodate colleagues who find that they cannot work in peace or concentrate in places such as the Cloisters, which is a corridor and a public thoroughfare.

Miss Nicholson: There is a benefit in working in such a cramped environment—the sense of comradeship and community. We are all battling against the same difficulties of volume in the modern world. *[Interruption.]* Over and above that, it enables us to concentrate in such environments as this Chamber at the moment, when hon. Members are attempting to thwart my speech. They are talking despite the importance of the topic. In a word, it teaches one concentration—and that art is highly prized in commerce and industry outside this place.

I wonder whether we are aware—despite, or perhaps because of, the slowness of change—how much conditions have imnproved in this place over the past 25 years. I understand that before my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) became Prime Minister, the only stamped envelopes that Members of Parliament were allowed to use were for destinations within the Greater London area. Those with constituencies in Cornwall or Devon had to pay for their postage.

Lest that sounds trivial to the electorate, I shall remind the House of an interesting statistic. Some 30 years ago, before this place became engulfed in such a volume of mail, the general public wrote to their Members of Parliament only a fraction of the number of times that they do now. Then, only 3 per cent. of the electorate wrote to their Members of Parliament in any one year; now, the figure has risen to 63 per cent. That explains why we have such great difficulty in coping with the volume of mail. That is not my imagination; it is actuality. Alas, it is the fault of our good friend the word processor, on which my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives commented when he responded to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

However we view the problem, we must come back to the central question of cost. This is a very expensive Palace of Westminster. We demand and acquire more services. We are looked after better and better and at greater and greater expense. The high cost of running the mother of Parliaments has put hon. Members off the sensible and sane plans which have been brought before the House but not implemented.

Cost is one of the real difficulties, and I believe that there should be some self-discipline and budgetary control in the mother of Parliaments. If we are to indulge ourselves by providing more accommodation for hon. Members or their staff—I heartily endorse the latter—there is a case for our looking more closely at our high expenditure. I hope that that will lead my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to examine with a much fiercer eye the number of hours we work. Is it honestly necessary for the mother of Parliaments to sit so much longer than Congress which, alas, has so much more regard, resources and responsibility than we have?

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will suggest to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that, while it is splendid that he should look at ways of enlarging our comfort and ease, we should look at how the budget balances and try to restrict some of our already large expenses.

[Miss Nicholson]

Other things matter as well. Health and safety have already been mentioned. It is a fact that, while others honour our health and safety legislation, the House of Commons does not have to do so. We pass the legislation, but we do not honour it. That is not a meritorious attitude. If we pass such legislation, we should honour it. I did not find it at all surprising that the first major case of salmonella which was egg-induced arose in the other place.

When one sees the desperately limited facilities that are available to the catering staff, one is astounded at the high-quality food and drink that they manage to turn out. The high standard they achieve is very creditable, given the difficulties under which they work.

I love to go downstairs and sit in the Members' cafeteria. The engraving on the wall there shows that it is very little different from what it was 200 or 300 years ago. It is fascinating to see the similarity, but the sensitivity with which we approach food today and the safety that we require surely mean that we should give our catering staff a better place in which to work than they have at the moment.

Facilities for the disabled is a subject that is close to all our hearts. I am fortunate enough to be chairman of ADAPT. It took us a long time to work out what ADAPT could be made to mean because we needed the word so very badly. It stands for Access for Disabled People to Arts Premises Today. It is the child of the Carnegie trust —that great trust which is perhaps the grandfather of all trusts in the United Kingdom. It was founded by Andrew Carnegie, who went to the United States of America and made his fortune in steel and railways. He set up an enormous trust in the United States and then came back and set up a more modest trust in Scotland. Out of his generosity came the building of most of our libraries, not the most modern ones but the Victorian libraries in all areas of the United Kingdom.

The Carnegie trust has not rested on those achievements. It is one of the quietest, most effective and largest trusts for good. It works on the same lines as the Rowntree trust and similar trusts. It created the body of which I have the honour to be chairman——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Miss Nicholson: Half the board of ADAPT is composed of people with profound disabilities. It makes decisions affecting arts premises and public libraries. What do we mean by arts premises? We mean cinemas, theatres, museums and all sorts of places where the public go for entertainment.

It is an appalling thing to say, but the only way for a disabled person in, for example, London to have a good night out with dignity is to stay at home in front of the television set. Therefore, the advisory committee of ADAPT had much work to do. Our task is to provide grant aid to stimulate the adaptation of cinemas, theatres, picture galleries, and public libraries as quickly and effectively as we can, by putting in induction loops for those with problems of hearing, by helping with Braille signing for those who are blind, and by putting in ramps and mechanisms for people whose main form of locomotion is not their legs but a pair of wheels. In that way, we help disabled people to have a happy night out with dignity. That is the function of ADAPT.

Like many hon. Members, I am involved in many charitable endeavours. All of us are in different ways as Members of Parliament. Many people ask me to be patron or chairman of voluntary bodies. I have accepted as many as possible, on the basis that when something is important we can have an occasional meeting here. In the case of ADAPT, having meetings here is a non-starter. Despite the best efforts of all our courteous, efficient staff, it is not possible to have even quarterly committee meetings here if most of the members of a committee are heavily disabled.

I know the difficulties of dealing with grade 1, treble-starred, listed buildings, or unique buildings such as the Palace of Westminster, but is it proper that the mother of Parliaments cannot without enormous problems welcome someone in a wheelchair? If someone in a wheelchair is coming here, the Member who has invited that person has to say, "Do not come to St. Stephen's entrance."

People in wheelchairs cannot come in by the normal way. They can come in without going through security. Because they are in wheelchairs they have to go round the back, to the entrance used by post office vans. Such people have to be met personally by the Member who has invited them. They have to be escorted to the lift and up to the principal floor as if they were criminals. Last week, 13 people died on the M4; a number were injured and some of them may end up in wheelchairs. Those people will suddenly realise that, as far as Parliament is concerned, they are on the other side of the fence, they are different. We ensure that that difference shows.

I have had to give up holding ADAPT board meetings in the mother of Parliaments, despite the fact that in our first year of office we have raised and spent more than £1 million on adapting buildings all around the United Kingdom. It is not open to me to adapt Parliament or to offer handicapped people an honest and honourable way in.

I believe most strongly that the mother of Parliaments should not discriminate. Our colour, background or physical and mental ability should not stop us from coming here and meeting our Member for Parliament. It should not stop disabled people from attending an ordinary meeting, even taking into consideration the problems that the rest of us face when meeting our constituents in the mother of Parliaments; yet it does.

Last week, the ADAPT board and I met representatives of the Royal Albert hall. I invited them here. We have offered the Royal Albert hall a rolling programme to alter the hall so that it can never again be said that it has 6,000 seats and only four places for wheelchairs. That is a great project to undertake, but what has happened? Because we had our meeting here, one of our brave ADAPT board members had to come here. We met in Committee Room 17, and to my humiliation, because of the enormous number of chairs there, our committee member had such difficulty getting in and out that she was seen not as the fascinating, interesting and highly intellectual woman that she is, but as an invalid—as someone different, someone in a wheelchair.

I know that the mother of Parliaments will always be imperfect in many ways, and perhaps it is for her imperfections that those of us who are fortunate enough to

be Members of this place love her so dearly. It is an honour and a joy for all of us to work here. I love the Palace of Westminster, and I believe that we all do.

None the less—with a proper bow both to modernity, as it is represented by the enormously hard-working hon. Member for Derbyshire, South, and to historic associations, in the different ability to work under pressure, demonstrated so superbly to me every day by my nearest colleague in the Cloisters, the hon. Member for St. Ives—please may we make enough progress to be able to offer a meeting so that a disabled person in a wheelchair may come here with dignity, or to offer our staff somewhere to work with a little privacy and greater comfort? We are fortunate to work here. Let us try to do a little better and to tackle with haste and urgency the problem highlighted by this debate.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you are aware, I applied for a second Adjournment debate and the Department of the Environment agreed to provide a Minister, providing that the first debate was concluded. The matter is quite clear.

My subject was the poll tax, which was very appropriate in view of the announcement today. In my view, although it was clearly in order, the Tory Whips have deliberately brought in speakers to spin out time and to prevent a debate on the poll tax.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): As the hon. Gentleman has so rightly said, the debate that we are proceeding with is perfectly in order.

10.8 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): We have had a useful debate, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), in which hon. Members from both sides of the House have taken part.

Today's proceedings have covered two parliamentary institutions—first, the Budget and then a debate about the fabric of Parliament itself. Both debates have been about money and about priorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South fulfilled her new year's resolution to take up the question of accommodation, not just for hon. Members but for their staff and others who work in the building. The House is grateful to her for the opportunity to debate a subject which has not been debated since December 1988. The debate has been wide ranging and some of the subjects raised do not fall within my responsibility—for example, questions of food, the hours during which Parliament sits, the mail and many others.

Some of the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South are covered by the New Building Sub-Committee and we are grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for bringing the House up to date on the Sub-Committee's deliberations and the progress that it has made towards phase 2, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South feels strongly—and rightly so.

During the debate, the difference of approach of many hon. Members towards their work has become clear. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is clearly plugged into every new device of information technology, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) is perfectly happy to work in the Cloisters. As many hon. Members have said, it is important not to impose a standard form of working.

When I recently returned to the Whips' Office and took with me my electric letter opener, an answering machine and a desktop printer, one or two members of the office regarded it all as highly dangerous. They regard a propelling pencil as a concession to technology and believe that one should go no further. We must remember that hon. Members discharge their obligations in different ways and we must respect their different approaches.

I was interested in the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) who said that it might be easier if hon. Members were given the opportunity to—as it were—opt out. They could forgo their claim to accommodation in this building either for themselves or for their secretaries, or both, in return for an enhanced allowance which would enable them to provide accommodation in their constituencies. Since I entered the House, one of the changes that I have noticed is in the number of hon. Members who have a highly developed operation in their constituencies. The allowances do not always cover that—telephone calls and other overheads must be met out of the allowance whereas, if the Members were based here, those costs would be covered by the House. I was interested in the idea that there could be a trade-off—perhaps we need not provide so much accommodation in the Palace at great cost if more Members were prepared to relocate their operations outside. However, that is not a matter for the Government. It is a personal observation from someone who has no secretary here and who makes very few claims on the facilities.

I endorse the kind words—which were echoed by many other hon. Members—of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South in commending the many people who have worked so hard to improve the facilities available to hon. Members and to their staff. The hon. Member for Ogmore and his colleagues on the New Building Sub-Committee have laboured for many hours on behalf of colleagues to secure improvements. It was suggested that hon. Members themselves have a role to play in organising themselves and the premises more effectively.

I remember the approach taken by Walter Harrison, who used to put a note on the desks of those whom he suspected did not use them frequently, saying, "Please ring my office at once." If no telephone call had been made within a few days, that desk was confiscated and allocated to someone who would make better use of it. I think that it was his successor, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who said that we should consider how we operate in the House and how to make better use of existing facilities.

The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and his colleagues on the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee are another hard-working group. I understand that it was the right hon. Gentleman—with active encouragement from my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—who secured the transformation in the Library corridor, which was referred to at the beginning of the debate. Part of a Members' cloakroom was converted for use by lady Members. The Sub-Committee has many other achievements to its name and has contributed significantly to improvements in

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accommodation. Its achievements often go unsung except when it has the temerity to seek to make changes that involve man's best friend.

Another role is played by staff, such as Committee Clerks, the Serjeant at Arms Department and the Parliamentary Works Office. All of them have a role to play in maintaining our facilities and in putting forward proposals for better facilities.

Considerable strides have been made in the past 10 years. None the less, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South was right to point out that Members, their staff and the staff of the House often have to work in less than satisfactory conditions. I have noticed how many Ministers who have rooms here have allocated their rooms to their secretaries because they are ashamed of the facilities that those secretaries would otherwise have. That is a clear comment on priorities and expectations.

Hon. Members can and do make their views known, and they have been doing that for the past two hours. Staff do not have the same opportunity. It is right to pay tribute to their contribution to the running of the House, often in trying circumstances, and to their forbearance. I assure them that their needs are being taken fully into account in the development plans.

One cannot accuse the House of not having given careful thought to its needs and one cannot accuse Governments of either party of rushing into solutions. The first mention of using Bridge street as a site for hon. Members was in a debate in March 1960. Lord John Hope, the Minister of Works, announced:

"The Government have decided to apply for designation for Government development of the area bounded by Bridge Street, Whitehall, New Scotland Yard and the Embankment."

He then said prophetically:

"As the House knows, that is bound to take a bit of time".

He was proved wrong when he said:

"I believe hon. Members, on the whole, would feel that it is not a good thing for Members to go over to Bridge Street."
—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1960; Vol. 620, c. 1527-28.]

It was seen as suitable for those who did not need to be on the spot. Even though the perspective has changed, the need to maximise the number of Members' offices within the Palace is still the aim of the House.

Barbara Castle, now Lady Castle, led for the Opposition in that debate. The only hon. Member who spoke then who is still in the House is the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Rab Butler closed the debate as Leader of the House. He mentioned that there were only 124 Members' secretaries' desks and that there was no waiting list. As a Minister, he announced that he had ordered an extra 25 filing cabinets for Members. In a plebiscite for the Stokes committee, only 295 Members said that they wanted a desk. A Minister had recently said that one telephone per desk was over-egging the pudding. In addition to the Bridge street site, a number of other schemes were also under consideration. There was a suggestion that the Palace should be completed as Barry had intended by entirely enclosing New Palace Yard with an extension from the Clock Tower to the St. Stephen's entrance. There was a proposal to use the roof spaces and to infill the courtyards.

As a result of that debate, in the 1960s and the 1970s, the north and south Upper Committee Corridors, the Star Chamber Court block and the tea room block in Commons Court have all been used to provide additional accommodation. The Barry extension, surrounding New Palace Yard, proved too controversial.

There were major acquisitions in the 1970s, such as Norman Shaw North and South, which accommodates almost 150 Members, the Library and 200 secretaries' desks. The development of Bridge street has been less encouraging. A number of plans have come to naught, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South and other hon. Members referred. The House will recall the design with which Spence and Webster won the competition for a new parliamentary building, which was abandoned in 1976. There were plans by Sir William Holford in the early 1960s, by Sir Leslie Martin for the whole of the Whitehall area in the mid-1960s and the Casson Conder comprehensive proposals which were abandoned in 1979, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South said.

Although 1979 saw the cancellation of the then latest scheme for improving accommodation for Members and staff, and was the cause of more delay, it could in retrospect be seen as a watershed. Instead of large-scale developments causing major demands on the public purse, we have gone forward since then in smaller bites. As a result, we have achieved more in the 1980s on the site than in the whole of the previous 20 years.

It may be appropriate to mention the important role played by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). He achieved that sea change in 1979, and pushed through phase 1 of the redevelopment. It is appropriate that he is back at the Department to do the same for phase 2.

The first of the recent major improvements was 1 Canon row, occupied in summer 1989. Although it was refurbished only for short-term use pending redevelopment as part of the Bridge street project, it none the less provided some worthwhile gains, accommodating 30 Members' secretaries, providing training accommodation for the *Official Report* and bringing together the staff of the Parliamentary Works Office. Better police accommodation has been provided, as—most recently—has an improved gymnasium, for which tribute should be paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer).

There were also consequential gains in the Palace. The leader of the Liberal Democrats—who do not seem to be represented in this debate—gained a much larger suite of offices, and additional Members' offices were built on the official corridor, off the Strangers' Gallery and on the ground floor—about 10 in all. That may not seem a lot, but it is at least significant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South rightly mentioned the progress—and lack of progress—with Bridge street phase 1. The contract was let in May 1987 and work started in the following month for completion in May 1990. The new accommodation should have been available for occupation at the end of the summer recess last year, but it is a matter of history that that did not happen. The Services Committee commented that the lack of progress was

"a sorry commentary on the state of the building industry",

and I tend to share that view, but there will be other occasions for a post mortem; perhaps tonight we can look forward.

The fine building that emerged from the scaffolding is now clearly visible. I do not know whether my hon. Friend

has been around the building, but it is well worth a visit. I was enormously impressed by the way in which the work had been carried out and by the high standard of finish. It will, I think, be a very attractive proposition for hon. Members who locate there.

It is equally obvious that the work is now coming to an end. The main contractors' senior managers have said that the contract will be completed by Easter, which is less than two weeks away. There is still some major snagging work to be completed and a good deal of effort is going into that. I hope that on this occasion the House will not be disappointed.

I know that the New Building Sub-Committee is keeping a close eye on developments. It will visit the site shortly after Easter to confirm that the forecast has been fulfilled, as will I. If the target is achieved, moves into the building will start at the time of the spring bank holiday, and should be completed by the end of the summer recess. The building will provide accommodation for 100 Members' secretaries and 60 Members, a cafeteria seating 150 for the use of both Members and staff, a Library for all those north of Bridge street and residences for senior staff, as well as overnight sleeping accommodation.

The benefits, however, will be enjoyed not only by those who move into the new building. There will be less overcrowding in existing Members' offices, less pressure on the catering facilities in the Palace, improved Library facilities and better offices for staff. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives suggested that there might be less congestion in the Cloisters. That is a matter for the usual channels, but I am sure that his suggestions will be taken on board.

The vacated residences of the Serjeant at Arms, the Deputy Serjeant and the Speaker's Secretary are all to become Members' offices. It will also be possible to bring into use the derelict area above the Speaker's Secretary's residence, which will mean further gains for Members. Following phase I and the consequentials, 112 secretaries and 127 Members will gain desks. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South, will need to put her case as persuasively as she can to my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip, whose responsibility this is—patronage: that is real power! Even those who do not succeed in obtaining one of the new rooms should at least find that their existing rooms are less crowded. Those changes should all be completed early in the new year.

Not only will Members gain; particular attention has been paid to the Refreshment Department, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson). It is acknowledged that there is a serious problem there. Additional accommodation has been allocated on the ground floor of the Palace: that will be used for lockers and changing rooms this year, while long-term plans are developed in conjunction with the Catering Sub-Committee. The Administration Department will also gain significantly more space this year in Dean's Yard to help overcome the present shortage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South expressed concern about the speed at which phase 2 has been developed. Hon. Members in all parts of the House agree that the accommodation ought to be provided quickly. The Services Committee produced its report—"New Parliamentary Building (Phase 2). The Next Steps"—which we debated about two years ago. The report recommended that consultants should be appointed to carry out preliminary design work on New Palace Chambers, to identify suitable uses for Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street and to undertake a feasibility study of the proposed Bridge street subway.

Following a fee-bidding exercise, Michael Hopkins and Partners was appointed in 1989. Both the House and the Department have appointed an eminent architect. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South perhaps knows the cutlery factory that the company designed for David Mellor—not my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor)—at Hathersage. It won a Royal Institute of British Architects Award in 1989. Already we have firm evidence of Mr. Hopkins's foresight. In addition to undertaking the three particular studies, he was asked whether he could undertake a sharp, short look at the total site. That proved invaluable when, shortly afterwards, London Underground announced its intention to extend the Jubilee line with a new station on the phase 2 site.

The phase 2 site is the last opportunity to provide purpose-made accommodation in a new building close to the House. It is important, therefore, to know in detail what is needed. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ogmore listened to what my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South said about facilities for the disabled. In addition to what can be supplied in phase 2, I understand that further improvements are about to be put to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee to improve facilities in the Palace.

It was agreed that the Sub-Committee should undertake what has become known as the space audit. It looked at existing accommodation—particularly offices—to assess both the needs and the shortfall. It involved a thorough review of all the existing accommodation. It is the first time that there has been a qualitative and quantitative assessment. It found that between 210 and 230 offices were needed for Members and for an equivalent number of staff.

It would be wrong to prejudge the views of the Services Committee on the proposals, but I understand that they have been generally well received. These recommendations, together with bids from departments of the House, form the basis of the proposed brief which will be available for hon. Members to consider on 21 March in Committee Room 7. I urge all hon. Members to visit the room. Initially, only about 60 hon. Members responded to the request made by the hon. Member for Ogmore for proposals.

What is the next step? The Services Committee will produce a final brief soon after the Easter recess. That is obviously another important stage. Then we shall have in place the site, the architect and the requirement, after which we shall be able to put forward a coherent set of proposals to the Treasury. We shall be seeking agreement in principle to funds amounting to some £60 million. At a time when we are urging everyone to provide value for money and to look carefully at public expenditure proposals, the House must apply the same criterion to its own proposals.

Much design work still needs to be done. The House will want to see the design proposals and to form a view. We must also consult the Royal Fine Art Commission at the appropriate stage and seek planning approval. A rough estimate suggests that another 18 months to two years' design work is necessary and that the construction period could take three or four years. I know that my hon.

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Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South will say that that is a long period, but I am confident that she will still be in the House at the end of the construction period.

One has to remember that this development is a little different from the construction of a new car factory in her constituency. Apart from its being a large development, it is a difficult site technically. It is the last remaining site to be developed in the sensitive Westminster-Whitehall area. It provides a backdrop to an internationally famous sight. It is crucial that we get it right, not just for the benefit of the House in functional terms but so that we can show that this country can produce late 20th century architecture that is worthy of the site. We want it to be something that we can show to the world.

This has been a most helpful debate at an important stage in the timing of phase 2. As a Department of the Environment Minister, I have found it helpful to gauge the feeling of the House. Moreover, the hon. Member for Ogmore has had the opportunity to put his toe in the water and feel the temperature. I conclude by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South and colleagues in all parts of the House for a most constructive and helpful debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

GATT

1. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made in the GATT Uruguay round.

11. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the prospects for resumption of negotiations on the Uruguay round of GATT.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Government greatly welcome the recent resumption of negotiations in the GATT Uruguay round. We hope that the negotiations can now be brought to a successful conclusion as soon as possible. We should like all parties to commit themselves to a deadline of not later than the end of the year.

Mr. Dunnachie: When does the Minister believe that the European Commission will agree to a new negotiation position on agriculture? What is the United Kingdom's position on the reduction of subsidies for agriculture exports? Does the Minister agree with the Italian Trade Minister, who said that the system of negotiation in Europe is completely hopeless? If he does agree, what does he propose to do about it?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman may know that the Commission has accepted a work programme involving negotiations to achieve specific binding commitments on three issues—internal support, market access and export competition. That is what the United States and the major agricultural exporters wanted. I believe that the offer provides considerable scope for the negotiations to move forward to a successful conclusion as soon as possible.

Mr. Waller: As serious negotiations are not expected to start until June and may not be completed by the end of the year, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be appropriate to extend MFA 4 for a further 17 months? We should bear it in mind that the bilateral agreements that will run out at the end of the year essentially depend on MFA 4, which runs out at the end of July. Many of our European partners and the United States agree that there should be no further concessions on MFA 4. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should also be our position until the new GATT arrangement is entered into?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that serious negotiations are under way, although they may not bring in the most difficult political decisions until June. I also assure him that we all recognise the need to extend the multi-fibre arrangement in the light of the failure to agree in Brussels last December. However, I would not go as far as to say that an extension of 17 months would be justified now. It is important and necessary to bring the negotiations to a conclusion as soon as possible; there are dangers in not doing so. In those circumstances an initial extension of, say, five months would be more appropriate.

Mr. Madden: Given that 400 jobs a week have been lost in the clothing and textile industry in the past 12 months, will the Minister give a firm assurance along the lines of the one that he has just given? As textile workers are not only workers with a vested interest in the future of the industry but consumers too, will he make it clear that, if 10 Downing street or the Treasury has any thoughts about extending VAT to children's clothing, they will be strongly resisted by his Department?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman recognises that all his textile workers, indeed all his constituents, are consumers, because consumers will be the main beneficiaries of a successful outcome to the Uruguay round. We recognise the importance of the textile industry and that is why we welcome the progress that was made last year in the negotiations on textiles, particularly the progress in providing better mechanisms and disciplines for the GATT round, which we have always said must accompany the incorporation of textiles into the GATT.

Telecommunications

2. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact that the introduction of the ending of the duopoly in telecommunications, as outlined in his Department's recent White Paper on telecommunications policy, will have on consumer choice.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): The Government's telecommunications policy will ensure that consumers have the widest possible choice of high-quality services at the most competitive price.

There will be a wider choice in all aspects of telecommunications from equipment and services to networks themselves.

Mr. Smith: Has not there been a remarkable transformation in telecommunications over the past decade? Does my right hon. Friend recall that only 10 years ago there was only one supplier of telephones and telephone services and that people sometimes had to wait for weeks or months to get a telephone? Today, any number of companies are providing hardware and telephone lines. Is not that a substantial endorsement of the policies of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation which the Government have followed?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I recall that at the beginning of the last decade, when British Telecom was still nationalised, about 250,000 people were waiting for more than six months to have lines installed. I am glad to say that the number of people in such a position now is negligible. Not only have the changes been

dramatic over the past decade, but, as a result of the liberalisation that we have announced and the greater competition and choice, we foresee even greater changes in the coming decade.

Mr. Henderson: Will the Secretary of State be honest enough to admit that selling further British Telecom shares has nothing to do with more competition, nothing to do with addressing the 500,000 complaints that British Telecom receives every year or securing the necessary research and development to ensure that new technology is available and that mobile phones will work, and nothing to do with increasing telephone ownership or obtaining more investment, but everything to do with failed dogma and raising money? The Government are going for the loot to try to solve the poll tax fiasco.

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's question and the prominence that he gives to the Labour party's love of state ownership and its desire to restore British Telecom to nationalised ownership. Nationalisation has nothing to do with choice, the consumer or creating a dynamic industry such as we have created. It would certainly not have made this country the telecommunications hub of western Europe which it has become, with major companies moving their telecommunications headquarters from north America to London to take advantage of the liberalisation that we have created.

Mr. Gale: Is not there tremendous potential for the development of telecommunications and for the creation of jobs in telecommunications, voice telephony, data and entertainment? Will not that be a growth area in which Britain can take a tremendous lead? Would not the Opposition's plans to renationalise British Telecom destroy those prospects?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The jobs created by the proliferation of services built on the back of a liberalised telecommunications regime are important. We already have value-added services on the network, double those of France and Germany, and I foresee a great new source of jobs in the cabling of Britain through the cable television networks as well as an increase in the number of trunk networks following the end of the duopoly regime.

Shipbuilding

3. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the European Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, to discuss shipbuilding within the United Kingdom and the EC.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will meet Sir Leon Brittan on 22 March to discuss a number of issues. I shall be seeing him tomorrow to discuss shipbuilding issues in particular.

Mr. Leadbitter: I am glad that the Secretary of State is to see the Commissioner tomorrow to discuss various matters. Is the Minister aware that, as recently as 5 March this year, *Lloyd's List* published an account showing a dramatic 80 per cent. decline in British shipbuilding in the past decade? Is he aware that Denmark, Italy and Germany have increased their share of the world market in shipbuilding orders, whereas British shipbuilding's share has shrunk to 0·77 per cent? Bearing in mind today's calamitous news about shipbuilding in Barrow-in-Furness, what does the Minister propose to do to encourage our shipbuilding industry, which is one of the finest in the world, to expand? Or is he going to sit on his backside and let the industry decline further?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman's latter point was the serious part of the question. I was sorry to hear the news from Barrow today which is, of course, the result of the company's need to restructure and improve its competitiveness in the face of changing defence requirements. I shall be visiting Barrow on Monday and I shall be able to see at first hand the nature and scale of the problems facing British Shipbuilders Enterprise Ltd. and their likely impact on the local community.

I repeat that I shall be seeing Sir Leon Brittan tomorrow and I shall discuss with him the aid that we are allowed by the Commmission to give to British shipbuilding. Given that British shipbuilding has restructured so successfully over the past 10 to 15 years —it is now more competitive than it has ever been and is well placed to take advantage of the recent upsurge in shipbuilding orders worldwide—it is clearly in the interests of British Shipbuilders that we phase out subsidies as soon as we can and I shall continue to urge the Commission to do just that.

Mr. Hill: Does my hon. Friend recall that some years ago—before he was a Minister—there was a European scrap and build scheme, aimed mainly at the safety factor of merchant shipping? In his discussions with Sir Leon Brittan, will he explore the possibility of any part of such a scheme being used to support some of Britain's shipbuilding potential? Rather than wasting vast sums on some social scheme or other, the European Community might introduce a scrap and build scheme to which all the nations could agree.

Mr. Leigh: That is an interesting suggestion. I shall certainly examine it carefully and, if appropriate, raise it with Sir Leon tomorrow. The Commission permits us to put a subsidy of 13 per cent. on large ships and we subsidise large ships to the maximum extent that we are allowed. I will pursue with Sir Leon any other ways in which we can help British Shipbuilders.

Ms. Quin: Will the Minister give a clear undertaking to discuss with Sir Leon——

Mr. Skinner: They have given money to Germany.

Mr. Holt: Shut up.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that it is better left to me. Ms. Quin.

Ms. Quin: Will the Minister give a clear undertaking that, when he meets Sir Leon Brittan, he will discuss the catastrophic job losses in Barrow? Will he confirm that, unless action is taken, the losses are likely to occur within two years rather than four years? Can he give the workers in Barrow any hope that some of them will retain jobs in the merchant shipbuilding sector, or does he propose simply to let the decline in that sector continue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) suggested?

Mr. Leigh: I have already said that I shall be raising a number of matters with Sir Leon Brittan tomorrow. I gave a full answer to the earlier question and I have nothing to add—except that we understand that the job losses will take place over four years. I repeat that they are the result of the restructuring deemed necessary by management in the face of changing defence requirements.

Credit Lending

4. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps are being taken to curb irresponsible credit lending.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): The Government set out in December 1990 proposals for improved regulations on credit marketing and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs will take the hon. Gentleman's comments as a reply to the consultation document.

Mr. Smith: In view of the mounting misery caused by irresponsible lending, with mortgage repossessions doubling last year and with the Oxford money advice project in my constituency reporting default actions up by 10 per cent., bailiffs' warrants up by 16 per cent. and bankruptcy petitions up by 88 per cent., is not it time that the Minister took some action? Should not he also launch a rescue package for the many advice centres facing closure as a direct consequence of the Government's poll tax capping policy—in many cases, leaving the people in the deepest debt with nowhere to turn?

Mr. Redwood: I have just told the hon. Gentleman that the Government have taken action. We have set out proposals to make it clearer to those entering into credit agreements what the rate of interest would be and what the impact would be on their family budgets. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would welcome those proposals if he read the document and saw what the Government were trying to do. The Government also support various schemes to help those involved in offering advice on consumer debt. That is part of helping the market work. It is most important to have clear disclosure to all those thinking of embarking on new debt and that is precisely what the proposals set out in the consultation document do.

Mr. Nicholls: Although I dismiss the nonsense that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and pay credit to the steps that the Government have taken in this area, I continue to receive examples in my constituency of offers of credit that are clearly irresponsible and should not have been made. Does my hon. Friend accept that sometimes there is such a disparity in the bargaining position between lender and borrower that the matter must be kept under review? Despite the steps that have already been taken, will the Government continue to keep the matter under review and respond to individual cases that might be drawn to their attention?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend can have that reassurance. Of course, the Government are watching the matter closely and are involved in consultations with regard to proposals that we believe will go a long way towards remedying the defect that my hon. Friend recognised. In the pre-agreement phase it is most important that the consequences of that agreement should be clear to individuals so that they can understand what impact it would have on their family budgets. I am worried about Labour's proposals, which seem to suggest that people should not be able to borrow in certain circumstances. That could make their position far worse. We want to see responsible borrowing based on a sensible regime of disclosure of the consequences to those thinking of entering into agreements.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Why have the Government failed to implement the proposals in the 1988 White Paper to protect the public against irresponsible extortionate credit deals? With 170,000 people unable to pay bad debts to five and more creditors, why are not the Government commissioning a report from the Office of Fair Trading on extortionate credit agreements?

Mr. Redwood: The Government are consulting on all those matters at the moment. The hon. Gentleman is quite at liberty to send in his views, which we should be most interested to see. The action that we propose addresses the very issue about which the hon. Gentleman is worried. It would cover advertising and the agreements themselves and deal with matters such as sending details to minors, which we believe is quite wrong and about which there are recommendations in the consultative document. Will the Opposition please read the consultative document and give us the benefit of their advice on it?

Mr. Alton: While welcoming the consultative document and the remarks that the Minister has just made, may I ask him to accept that the phenomenal growth of consumer credit from £15 billion to £50 billion this year, coupled with the growth of credit cards—2 million are available in Germany compared with 30 million in this country—requires rather more than simply responsible borrowing and probably requires tighter controls on the kind of credit facilities that can be made available? Many families, especially poorer ones, are becoming increasingly indebted and 2·5 million families are now in serious debt.

Mr. Redwood: The savings ratio has been rising. All Conservative Members welcome that and it shows that the balance between saving and borrowing is improving in the way in which the hon. Gentleman suggests. Is the Liberal Democratic party really suggesting that people should not have access to credit on any basis? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that 84 per cent. of personal borrowing is in the form of mortgages, not in the form of credit cards? The main factor in any credit increase is mortgages, not credit cards.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend rule out of his consultation exercise at this stage any possibility of introducing credit control curbs along the lines advocated by the Opposition? Would not they reduce the amount of credit and competition available for the mass of responsible borrowers and also destroy the credibility of United Kingdom financial institutions, thus making a free gift to their overseas competitors?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes two extremely powerful points. The Labour scheme would not work, because there would be ways of borrowing from banks outside our jurisdiction. However, to any extent that it was effective in limiting some people in gaining access to borrowing, it could be an extremely cruel scheme. People

need to borrow. We are trying to make sure that they do so on an informed basis, aware of what impact it will have on their budgets, so that they can come to sensible decisions before committing themselves to undesirable borrowings.

Electricity Prices

5. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with large industrial users of electricity regarding the proposed increases in electricity prices.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has met the chairman of ICI to discuss that problem. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be happy to hear further representations, but the main responsibility rests with the Department of Energy and with the regulator of electricity.

Mr. Jones: Of course, the main responsibility rests with the Department of Energy, but I am sure that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be concerned about the effects on large industrial users of increasing electricity prices—much above the already scandalous 13 per cent. being charged to domestic consumers. Is the Minister concerned that that rise is due to the privatisation of a service industry and that, far from helping British industry, it is nailing British manufacturing industry to the wall?

Mr. Redwood: I do not agree that that is the result of privatisation. It is the result of the costs of generating power and the allocation of those costs to larger industrial users. The hon. Gentleman might like to know that our energy costs for large industrial users are below those of Germany, one of our main competitors.

Mr. John Browne: Will my hon. Friend confirm that companies are free to negotiate price with the electricity companies and generators and, furthermore, that electricity companies are free to offer discounts or even cash rebates to companies or individuals who invest in energy-saving measures?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes good points. Of course, the idea of opening the market to competition is that large industrial users can think of other ways of gaining the power that they need by involving themselves in generation schemes or by encouraging new generators to enter the market. That is exactly what will happen. I am sure that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) will welcome the progress that has been made in letting industry have more choice and control over power sources, quality and price.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister accept that in Germany 35 per cent. of energy supplies benefit industry because they come from lignite mines near Bonn? Does he further accept that British industry would have considerably reduced electricity costs if we developed the lignite mines in the United Kingdom? Such resources would provide much greater energy than those in Iraq.

Mr. Redwood: The Government welcome the development of any energy sources that improve the supply and cost of energy, subject to the normal planning constraints and the energy policy laid down by the Department of Energy. I am sure that in the new competitive conditions in the energy market more innovation will be a characteristic, although whether it will include what the right hon. Gentleman recommends is a matter for the market, not for me.

Post Office

6. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to denationalise the Post Office and end its letter monopoly.

Mr. Leigh: The Government remain fully committed to the existence of a national letter service with an affordable, uniform tariff structure available to everyone, including those in rural areas. Girobank has been transferred successfully to the private sector, but no other decisions about structural changes have been taken.

The Post Office's letter monopoly is a privilege, not a right. Although we keep the options under review, we have no present plans to alter the scope of the monopoly. However, in the event of a cessation or serious disruption to the letter services we would consider suspending it.

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend will be aware that since the denationalisation of telecommunications and the introduction of competition to that industry, the price of making a telephone call has gone down in real terms. Is my hon. Friend aware that there will be considerable support on Conservative Benches if, when the Government consider the future of the Post Office, they take close account of experience to date through the privatisation of British Telecom?

Mr. Leigh: Although one might be able to admire my hon. Friend's radical zeal in seeking to privatise the Post Office, I suspect that it would be unwise at this stage for me to replicate it from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Loyden: Recognising the Government's attitude to intervention in these matters, may I ask the Government to take into account the need for a Post Office building programme? Is he aware that in many constituencies pensioners have to queue outside in the cold months of December, January and February to get their pensions and so on? Will he take up that matter with the chairman of the Post Office?

Mr. Leigh: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman was making. Was he saying that he wishes the Post Office to be privatised? I know not. However, 94 per cent. of post offices are already privately run. The point of our continuing review of the Post Office is to improve structures. We are not looking at ownership alone. The most important thing is to improve the service to the public, and that is what we have always been concerned about.

Economic Priorities

7. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industry about the Government's economic priorities.

Mr. Lilley: I continue to receive representations from industry supporting the Government's determination to defeat inflation and to create a climate in which enterprise and wealth creation can flourish.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that yesterday's cut in corporation tax reflects the Government's determination to create the right climate in the market for business and, coupled with the Government's determination to drive down inflation still further, represents the real needs of British industry?

Mr. Lilley: I can, indeed, confirm those points. The reduction in corporation tax that was announced yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be of significant benefit to industry. We already have the most attractive environment for industry of any country in western Europe, which is why we attract more inward investment than any other country in western Europe. Tax is a major part of that and we now have the lowest rate of corporation tax of any country in the EEC.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State explain why one of the Government's economic priorities is to increase unemployment in the retail sector? Does he agree that the increase in value added tax that was announced yesterday is bound to have a significant effect on that sector and will significantly increase the recession in retailing?

Mr. Lilley: That is absolute nonsense. One of the policies of the hon. and learned Gentleman's party has always been to spread VAT more widely.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it can be estimated that a 1 per cent. downward movement in inflation could save British businesses £5 billion? Was not the key announcement in yesterday's Budget, therefore, the expectation that inflation could be down to 4 per cent. by the last quarter of this year? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that that means that, on top of the welcome corporation tax reductions yesterday, the Government are doing the right thing for British industry?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend highlights an important point. The reduction in inflation that was forecast in the Budget as being faster than was previously expected will be immensely welcome to British industry. It is the key to our economic future and to solving all other economic problems.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Is not it the case that the day after what the Chancellor called the Budget for business 7,000 redundancies and almost 100 company closures have already been announced? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that growth is down by 2 per cent. this year, manufacturing output is down by 5 per cent. and investment is down by a massive 10 per cent., which is the worst record in western Europe and the worst in British history since 1932? Why is the interest rate cut that industry needs being delayed? Is not it the case that the Budget does too little, too late to prevent a spring and summer of redundancies, closures and bankruptcies, which is the direct responsibility of this Government's Ministers who have failed?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman plays his normal recorded message to us, unchanged since before the Budget. British industry has responded to the Budget by welcoming it and all its major tax changes, which it considers essential for the future of this country. It is significant that the hon. Gentleman did not even mention them.

Mrs. Peacock: Has my right hon. Friend received any representations from business men, asking him to introduce an industrial policy similar to that recently outlined by the Labour Opposition?

Mr. Lilley: No, I have not. On the contrary, I have met many business men who have said that the last thing that they want is men in Whitehall telling them how to govern their companies. They welcome the fact that we are leaving more money in the hands of business so that they can take the decisions on investment, research and development, and training, which will strengthen their companies in the future.

ICI Fertiliser Business

8. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in view of the response of ICI to the Government's rejection of the proposed sale of its fertiliser business to Kemira Oy, the Government will review the priority that they give to maintaining employment in arriving at such decisions.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend will continue to regard competition as the essential matter when deciding his policy on references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, in its report on the Kemira case, the MMC went into the issue of employment, among several others. When considering that matter, my right hon. Friend looked at the whole report before coming to his conclusion.

Mr. Strang: Yes, but when hardly a day goes past without a major announcement of an industrial closure somewhere in the country, are the Government really prepared to shut down their productive capacity and destroy the hundreds of jobs that go with it for the sake of their dogma and opposition to state enterprise? Will the Minister confirm that ICI is going ahead with its plan to close down the plants and that in Edinburgh, for example, 140 direct jobs will be lost, not to mention the indirect jobs? What message has the Minister for the employees? Surely the Government must think again when the only alternative is the dole.

Mr. Redwood: If hon. Members read the report, they will see that the market share of the merged company was predicted to fall to 35 per cent. in a falling market. We are talking about a market with over-capacity and with considerable problems resulting from that. I find it difficult to reconcile that forecast of the market and the market share with the idea that all those jobs and all that plant could have been sustained had the merger gone ahead. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to weigh many difficult matters in coming to his conclusion on the judgment of the MMC, but he decided that the MMC was right in its report, and that is where the matter rests.

Taxes and Public Expenditure

9. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industry about taxes and public expenditure.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget is a Budget for business. It has been widely welcomed as such by industry generally.

Mr. Franks: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the announcement early this morning of projected job losses of 3,000 to 5,000 in the shipyards of Barrow over the next four years. When formulating regional policy involving public expenditure, will my right hon. Friend recognise the inevitable consequences of the peace dividend in places such as Barrow-in-Furness? Will he recognise that, inevitably, his Department will have an increasing role to play in my constituency?

Mr. Lilley: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the job losses announced in his constituency. As he will have heard, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be visiting his constituency shortly to assess the position. I believe that the measures taken in the Budget will make Britain in general and Barrow-in-Furness in particular more attractive to inward investment and for the development of new businesses. The measures to encourage small businesses will be particularly helpful and the reduction in corporation tax will attract industry to this country. I hope that that will bring benefits rapidly to my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Gordon Brown: How does the Secretary of State think that it will help struggling businesses if millions of purchases in our high streets and shops are to be subject to an unwanted and unnecessary 2·5 per cent. poll tax supplement? Has he, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, made an assessment of the number of jobs that will be lost in textiles, electronics and high streets and shops as a result of the poll tax supplement? Or is it the case that to escape from the poll tax chaos that the Government have created, they are prepared to sacrifice the interests of anyone and everyone?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is apparently unaware that a transfer of tax from one source to another does not reduce the net purchasing power of consumers. He also has not let the House know how he would raise the taxation necessary for local government. Would he increase income tax instead of value added tax? He and his party will have to come clean about that before the end of Monday.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the small firms sector gives the warmest welcome to the way in which the Chancellor responded to its representations and that the very last thing that it wants is a return to the conditions that prevailed when the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was Minister responsible for small firms? Will my right hon. Friend convey one other representation to the Chancellor from the small firms for an early reduction in interest rates?

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the points that my hon. Friend makes. He knows more about small firms than does the whole of the Labour Front Bench put together. He is right that the Budget has been well received by small firms. In particular, the rise in the threshold below which small firms do not have to pay VAT and the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor got that through the European Commission are extremely welcome. I shall convey to my right hon. Friend my hon. Friend's point about interest rates.

Recession

10. Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the north-east regional CBI to discuss the recession in industry.

Mr. Leigh: Officials of my Department keep in touch with the north-east regional CBI on a wide range of business matters. The Secretary of State last met John Banham, director general of the CBI, on 5 February 1991 and he next expects to meet Sir Brian Corby, president of the CBI on 11 April 1991.

Mr. Radice: The Government have just been reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that, according to the Red Book, manufacturing output will fall by 5 per cent. and business investment will fall by almost 10 per cent. in 1991. In that connection, has the Minister noted the comments of the deputy director of the northern regional CBI, who said that there were no measures in the Budget that would help business confidence or investment? Is not that a scathing indictment of the Government's industrial and economic policy?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman's comments are singularly inappropriate on the day after the Budget pumped three quarters of a billion pounds into industry. His comments are also inappropriate because in his district of Derwent. 5,000 jobs were created in the 1980s and because over the past 10 years no less than £3·5 billion of Government aid has been given to the north-east, which was carefully targeted to underpin a new spirit of enterprise. If the hon. Gentleman talked more often to business men in the north-east, as I did at the presentation of the north-east business of the year award, he would know that there is a sea change in attitudes. No fewer than 9,500 new businesses register for VAT every year in the north-east.

Mr. Holt: Will my hon. Friend take it from me that the words of Opposition Members are typical of the Labour party in the north-east? They for ever talk the region down, even though we have had more Government investment targeted into the area. We are not suffering from the recession that they talk about in such loud voices all the time. With companies such as ENRON bringing a £50 million investment for cheap electricity to the north-east, it is the Government who are bringing into that area the benefits of Conservative Government.

Mr. Leigh: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is extraordinary that 10 years ago the region was heavily reliant on three declining industries, but is now one of the most vibrant and successful regions in Britain. Why do not Opposition Members speak up for their constituencies and about what is happening in the north-east? I give a pledge to the House. I shall go to the constituency of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and talk about York Thermostar creating new jobs in his constituency. I shall talk about Eurosil——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister should just answer the question that he has been asked.

Mr. Leigh: I shall also repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) said. We shall speak up for the north-east on Conservative Benches, even if Opposition Members do not do so.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the Minister now answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice)? He gave not his view, but that of the CBI in the region. It is not Labour knocking the area. We fight hard in the north-east with the Tory Government. Will the Minister answer the question? What was there in the Budget to encourage investment? He should answer the CBI for a change.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Lady asks what there was in the Budget to encourage investment. Did she not listen to the Budget? Does she not know that it put three quarters of a billion pounds into industry? It was one of the best Budgets for business that we have ever had. That is the truth, although she may not like it.

Companies (Foreign Capital)

12. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the number of firms established in the United Kingdom with foreign capital during the past year; how many jobs have resulted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: According to the figures recorded by the Invest in Britain bureau, 1990 was a very successful year for inward investment. There were 340 inward investment projects, which are expected to create 27,000 jobs and safeguard a further 34,000. That demonstrates the continuing confidence in the United Kingdom as a sound and stable economy for inward investment.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the United Kingdom attracted £46 billion worth of inward investment in 1988-89, three times as much as France and six times as much as Germany? Does not that confirm what he has said? The climate in the United Kingdom—particularly in Ealing—is just what is needed for inward investors and any other type of investor.

Mr. Leigh: This is an interesting question: why was inward investment so successful last year that 61,000 jobs were created? Why do investors want to come here? Why are we the No. 1 location? It is because we are an entrepreneurial, hassle-free business environment with the lowest corporation tax in not only the EEC but the G7 countries.

Mr. Hoyle: How many of these companies intend to undertake research and development in this country? Or are they building purely assembly plants? *[Interruption.]* Will the Minister listen, for a change? Is the Minister quite happy that we are being treated like a banana republic?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman will have to put aside his Luddite attitudes just once when it comes to inward investment. As is evident in the north-east in particular, inward investment has raised quality. It is interesting that, although such companies account for only 2 per cent. of establishments, they account for a staggering 18 per cent. of net output. They have improved business attitudes and they account for more capital investment than do other companies. They are 50 per cent. more productive than British companies, although we have doubled productivity. Inward investment is good for British companies and for Britain.

Mr. Viggers: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have been outstandingly successful in winning investment from Japan? More than 1,000 Japanese companies have invested here—representing 40 per cent. of all the investment in the European Community. Does my hon. Friend agree that, to a considerable extent, that investment is predicated upon our membership of the Community, and that it is crucial, if we wish to win further inward investment, that we show complete commitment to achievement of the single European market?

Mr. Leigh: Yes.

Timeshare Advertising

13. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is taking to prohibit misleading timeshare advertising.

Mr. Leigh: The Director General of Fair Trading made recommendations for changes to the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to tighten the controls on statements about services and to bring timeshare award schemes within the Act's powers. I announced on 18 February that I had accepted those recommendations in principle. The detail of their implementation will be dealt with as part of the general review of the Trade Descriptions Act currently being undertaken.

Mr. Martin: I welcome the Minister's reply, but I urge him to hurry up and implement his proposals. Like many people in Glasgow, I received a personal letter. Mine said "Congratulations, Mr. Martin. You have won a holiday." In other cases it was a car or an item of jewellery. I was supposed to report to premises that were rented by the day. One newspaper reported that folk who turned up had to be turned away because these people had run out of jewellery. It is a scandal not only that people are allowed to operate in that way but that local authorities and national bodies are allowed to provide names and addresses for use in that manner. I hope that the practice will be stopped.

Mr. Leigh: I agree absolutely. [HON. MEMBERS: "What will the Minister do about it?"] We shall amend the Trade Descriptions Act——

Mr. Foulkes: And put the Bill through all its stages in a day? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There seems to be an air of excitement today. I do not know the reason for it.

Mr. Leigh: We shall amend the Trade Descriptions Act to include award schemes. I should stress that a heavy responsibility rests on the public. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) went to one of those award schemes and demanded his Fiesta. Surely the towering presence of my right hon. Friend would put any timeshare tout into full retreat.

Mr. Michael Brown: I am sure that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) will be delighted

with what my hon. Friend has said. However, may I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Opposition's attitude in Standing Committee B this morning? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows that we are dealing with questions about Government policy.

Mr. Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that, this morning, he could have accepted an amendment relating to timeshare——

Mr. Speaker: No. I am afraid that the hon. Member is out of order. What goes on in Standing Committee may not be discussed on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is the Minister aware that many people are conned by those advertisements and by literature that comes through their letter boxes suggesting that they have won special prizes? For example, I was told that I had won a special and wonderful Volkswagen limousine. As I was very interested, I went to Glasgow to pick up the vehicle. Instead, I received a watch. I protested. I said that I thought that in taking the parliamentary road to socialism we would travel in British cars, but that was not to be. Irrespective of whether I received a watch—incidentally, the watch went to charity—many of my constituents received correspondence similar to that which was sent to me. It is about time that something was done to stop companies abusing their position by kidding people on that they will receive prizes when the reality is that they will not.

Mr. Leigh: I feel sorry for the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will not face too many disappointments in his forthcoming career. I understand that boats are offered in award schemes, and that might come in useful for the hon. Gentleman.

Telecommunications

14. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effects of Her Majesty's Government's telecommunications policies since 1987.

Mr. Lilley: Since 1987, the effect of the Government's telecommunications policies has been to boost competition, give customers greater choice, encourage innovation and cut prices. That has given us a dynamic telecommunications market which is the envy of the world. The recommendations in the recent White Paper will build on those successes.

Mr. Mitchell: Will my right hon. Friend mark the enormous contrast between the privatised BT of today, which is reducing the cost of call charges in real terms and has ensured that 96 per cent. of its coin boxes work, with the appalling state of affairs when the industry was nationalised? Then, it took an enormously long time to get any work done if, for example, one wanted a phone installed, charges were doubled in one year and a quarter of all coin boxes did not work. Will my hon. Friend condemn the decision of the Opposition, who have announced that they will renationalise BT after the next general election? Will he note that when those matters were discussed last Thursday during the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, only one Labour Member attended to defend the Labour party's policy, presumably because Labour Members generally were embarrassed by what Opposition Front-Bench Members were saying?

Mr. Lilley: Indeed. I read the report of the debate to which my hon. Friend refers, including the interesting contribution that he made to it. It is significant that Opposition Members did not turn up for it. Perhaps even more significant was their loud applause today for the notion of nationalisation. That is very much on their agenda. I am happy to say that given the opposition of the 1·5 million shareholders and of the many, many more millions of customers, the Labour party will not get a chance to renationalise BT.

Mr. George Howarth: Will the Secretary of State reconsider his position on the development of the broad-band network? In particular, will he consider allowing British Telecom and Mercury to carry entertainment in such a way that would create 3,000 jobs in my constituency at the BICC factory and 30,000 jobs nationally? That is the way forward with telecommunications, not by way of the bland statements that the Secretary of State made today.

Mr. Lilley: The House will recall that BT applied for and was allowed franchises for cable television. It has chosen to withdraw from them. Other cable companies are, happily, going ahead with cable television and cabling. BT has introduced on trunk networks about 1·1 million km of optic fibre compared with only 13,000 km before privatisation.

Manufacturing Output

16. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output in the west midlands.

Mr. Redwood: We have just had a Budget which sets out many favourable things for business which will help those in the west midlands, as elsewhere. The November 1990 survey by the CBI showed that 80 per cent. of all respondents thought that the prospects for the west midlands were good or very good. So do the Government, and we shall give every sensible support that we can.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister accept that the Budget was an insult to the 107,000 unemployed men and women in the west midlands? Is he aware that this week production has plummeted once more and that since the spring of 1990 it has fallen in terms of value by £20 billion? That has cost the west midlands 306,000 jobs. Is not it time that the Government, and especially the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget, took manufacturing industry seriously?

Mr. Redwood: The Government take manufacturing industry extremely seriously. There were many measures in the Budget that showed just that. Industry has welcomed the cut in corporation tax and the change in bad debt relief. It has welcomed many other measures in the Budget that will be of great assistance to business in terms of the tax structure and in the way in which taxes are computed. This is a most welcome Budget for business. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has already said, a large amount of money is being given back to the business sector

through the Budget as proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and that will be welcome in the west midlands as elsewhere.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does not my hon. Friend agree that manufacturing industry in the west midlands has been transformed for the better by the Government over the past 12 years and is infinitely better placed to meet the present difficulties? Does he further agree that yesterday's Budget paves the way for further interest rate cuts, which will be even more beneficial to British industry, particularly the manufacturing industries in the west midlands which are so capital-intensive?

Mr. Redwood: I know that industry has widely welcomed the interest rate cuts so far and we wish to see more progress on inflation and on the development of the recovery that the Chancellor outlined in his Budget statement. It is also true that there has been a recent letter to a leading national newspaper, commenting on how refreshing it is to hear that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is such a strong supporter of manufacturing and understands its importance in the modern economy.

I endorse the views expressed in that national newspaper by the director general of the Engineering Council.

Dr. Moonie: Will the Minister tell us the forecast for fixed investment in manufacturing industry next year?

Mr. Redwood: A forecast has been published and has already been mentioned during this Question Time. Investment in manufacturing has declined in recent months, but we look forward to a recovery, as the Chancellor outlined in his Budget speech, as the economy improves.

GATT

17. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reopening of GATT negotiations.

Mr. Sainsbury: We welcome the fact that a basis for the resumption of negotiations has now been established. We believe that a successful conclusion would provide a valuable non-inflationary stimulus to world trade and investment.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most important objectives of the current GATT round is to ensure that state subsidies made illegally to other foreign companies, which disadvantage our own companies, are eliminated? To that end, will he look again at the 1984 case of illegal state subsidies paid by the Belgian Government to Beaulieu, Belgium's largest carpet manufacturer, which have so far not been repaid? Does he understand that the House fully supports the Government's stance in urging through GATT that penalties be imposed on national Governments who do not ensure repayment of such illegal subsidies?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes an important point because the strengthening of the rules and disciplines of GATT is one of the main purposes of the current Uruguay round. It is one reason why we believe an early, successful conclusion of the round to be important. I also agree that it is most unsatisfactory that the penalties mentioned by my hon. Friend have still not been paid; we are looking to see how we can improve enforcement procedures in the Community.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister press for the extension of the multi-fibre arrangement beyond July this year, when it expires, if GATT does not prove satisfactory? As he knows, 14,000 jobs are directly involved in the textile industry in Bradford. It is a modern and up-to-date industry, in which the work force has co-operated enthusiastically in all the changes and modernisation. Those people deserve a Government who will preserve and develop jobs, but at the moment the Government seem to be letting the industry down—and that is the view of both trade unions and employers.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to be able to agree with the hon. Gentleman about the efforts that the textile industry has made to invest and to modernise. It is as a result of those efforts that, unfortunately, there have been job losses in some areas. It is important to the industry that the GATT round creates better market access for its exporters and I am glad to say that the industry is a successful exporter.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the importance of exports to Scotland, whose export record is even better than that of the Japanese, and in particular how whisky is affected in the negotiations? Will he also bear it in mind that malting barley and grain are essential ingredients in whisky and that without them we could not sell that marvellous product of which over 90 per cent. is exported from Scotland?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the exporting success of Scottish industry and commerce. I very much recognise the importance to that success of market access for that excellent product, Scotch whisky. When I talk to my opposite numbers in other countries I seldom miss an opportunity of not only commending the product but urging better market access for it.

Research and Development

18. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department is meeting its objective of encouraging industry to increase its funding of research and development.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is successful in encouraging industry to spend more on research and development. The total of industry-financed R and D has increased by almost one half since 1983 in real terms.

Dr. Bray: Is not it a matter of great concern that industrial research and development has fallen by 4·7 per cent. according to figures published last week by the Central Statistical Office? Since 1985, the only industry to have increased its research is the chemical industry, with a 41 per cent. increase in real terms. There have been catastrophic falls in R and D of 6 per cent. in electronics, 20 per cent. in aerospace, 39 per cent. in electrical engineering and 40 per cent. in mechanical engineering. Is not that proof positive of the disastrous failure of the Government's industrial policy?

Mr. Leigh: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the most valuable research and development in

industry is that planned for and funded by industry itself —that has grown by a half since 1983. Of the £7 billion spent on R and D in industry, no less than 73 per cent. comes from industry itself. However, it must be accepted that in some aspects of research and development, such as pre-competitive or collaborative research, particularly in small businesses, there is a role for the Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken a keen interest in such matters and introduced new schemes that are widely welcomed by industry. It will be good to end Question Time by quoting the Confederation of British Industry—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are obviously not interested in the views of the CBI—I thought that they were.

John Banham wrote to my right hon. Friend on 19 February and said:

"We were very pleased to hear the announcement of your new £48 million package of aid schemes for small firms . . . The addition of SPUR to the DTI portfolio and the greater emphasis you are now placing on technology consultancy . . . another area which we felt required strengthening and will, I am sure, be much welcomed by CBI Members."

Northern Ireland Electricity (Privatisation)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland, which are being published today in a White Paper.

In framing my proposals, I have had in mind four main objectives: to introduce competition wherever possible with the aim of achieving the lowest possible prices for consumers; to regulate the industry in a way which will protect consumers' interests and maintain security and safety of supply without being unduly intrusive; to diversify further the Northern Ireland economy through the introduction of enterprising new participants into the power sector; and to encourage participation by employees of Northern Ireland Electricity, as well as electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, in the ownership of the industry.

Competition is the best guarantee of consumers' interests and I believe that there is considerable scope for it to be introduced into the electricity industry in Northern Ireland. Since Northern Ireland Electricity is, at present, a vertically integrated undertaking with an effective monopoly on all aspects of electricity supply in Northern Ireland, this will mean a change in structure. I have concluded that generation must be separated from transmission, distribution and supply and that generating capacity should not be in the hands of a single owner.

I am proposing, therefore, that the four existing power stations will be sold to not fewer than two independent companies. This arrangement should encourage some competition between the existing stations and so provide an incentive for increased efficiency; but the major benefits of competition in generation will come when new power stations are needed. Competition to provide and operate the new stations should create a downward pressure on construction costs and on the price at which power is offered to the suppliers.

The transmission and distribution networks are natural monopolies which it would not be economic to duplicate. They, together with the supply business and the retail shops—that is, the remainder of NIE apart from generation—will remain as a single undertaking, which will have an obligation to supply electricity to consumers. It will meet this obligation by contracting with existing generators for power supplies and, when additional generating capacity is needed to meet rising demand or because of retirement of old power stations, it will seek competitive bids from operators willing to build stations and provide the required amounts of power.

Northern Ireland Electricity's existing power stations will, therefore, be offered for sale to trade purchasers by competitive tender. The transmission, distribution and supply business will be sold by public flotation.

In reaching my decision on the structure of the privatised industry, I considered a number of other possibilities, but I believe that the structure that I have outlined best meets my objective of seeking to introduce the maximum possible competition while minimising the need for intrusive regulation.

In restructuring the industry, I also wish to facilitate the introduction of competition in the supply of electricity. The existing generators and new entrants to the industry will be able to apply for permission to supply consumers directly but there will be limits on the extent of such supply, at least for an initial period. This is because, given the present characteristics of the Northern Ireland system, the immediate introduction of full-scale supply competition could work against the interests of consumers. In developing my proposals, however, I intend to examine how best to ensure that there is a progressive increase in supply competition in Northern Ireland over time.

I intend to bring forward draft legislation in the near future to enable the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland to be restructured in the manner that I have described and to provide for its privatisation. The legislation will establish new regulatory arrangements with the aim of encouraging competition, providing incentives for efficiency and ensuring that the resultant gains are fairly shared with consumers. There will be full consultation on the draft legislation and, in view of the importance of the provisions, I am extending the customary six-week period to 12 weeks.

In developing my proposals, I intend to work closely with the industry in order to ensure that the interests of consumers and Northern Ireland Electricity employees are protected. As was the case in Great Britain, employees' rights will be protected during the course of the industry's transfer to the private sector; existing pension arrangements will be safeguarded and the industry's existing negotiating and consultation machinery will remain as it is, although of course the unions and the new owners may wish to make changes in the future.

The White Paper makes reference to the need for new generating capacity in Northern Ireland. The provision of this new capacity will be a matter for the new owners, but the White Paper outlines a number of possibilities, including the acquisition of a supply of gas to the Province for power generation and the provision of an interconnector with Scotland.

The proposals that I have outlined, and which are set out in more detail in the White Paper, are designed further to strengthen the Northern Ireland economy and build on the achievements of the past, while creating a more competitive and efficient electricity industry to meet the future needs of consumers in the Province. They will also afford the people of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Electricity work force the opportunity to invest in their own industry, which has such a vital role in relation to the Province's economy.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I thank the Secretary of State for making his statement, but the White Paper is one Brooke initiative that we and the people of Northern Ireland could well do without.

It is significant that, in the proposals, the right hon. Gentleman did not seek the approval of the Northern Ireland parties which represent the people of Northern Ireland and which are all united with the Opposition against the general proposition and the hotch-potch of proposals which seems to be coming forward.

The right hon. Gentleman said recently that Britain had no selfish interest in Northern Ireland, but it has. It has a selfish interest in imposing outdated Thatcherite dogma upon the Province. There is only one consolation, and that

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

is the irony that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), is having to explain this all away in Belfast this afternoon.

In Northern Ireland, the electricity system is equivalent to only one medium-sized power station in England, yet it is to have imposed upon it another English solution—at least two generating companies and a grid. That is despite all the advice that the Government have received that, if privatisation goes ahead, it should be through one single generating and distributing agency.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the generating capacity which will go out to tender would cost at least £500 million to replace, but it is unlikely that he will receive more than between £100 million and £150 million—a nice sweetener indeed to PowerGen, Hanson, National Power or whoever happens to get control? It also means that the control of generating capacity in Northern Ireland will pass out of the control of either the Government or the people of Northern Ireland. As for putting things out to sale by flotation of the grid, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that will be the only opportunity that the people of Northern ireland will have to acquire any sort of share in what they already own—the Northern Ireland electricity undertaking?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that the recommendations in the White Paper are contrary to the advice given by the Northern Ireland electricity board, contrary to the advice given by consultants employed by that board, and also contrary to the initial advice given to the Government by their own consultants—until they were sent away to find new recommendations? Will he confirm that it is also contrary to the independent advice of Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte, which stated that, if privatisation should come about, it should be as one entity?

Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether decisions on the gas pipeline spur, the interconnector with the south of Scotland or reconnection with the Republic will be entirely decisions to be taken by the new owners, or whether there will be any inducements given to the new people to develop those processes, either from the European Community or from the British Government?

Can the Secretary of State confirm that Sir Desmond Lorimer is to be the new chairman of Northern Ireland Electricity, in place of Dr. Schierbeek, whose work was much admired and who advised against splitting up NIE and therefore resigned recently?

Will the Secretary of State accept that the decision to separate the generating system from the distribution system flies in the face of all modern thoughts of conservation? Does he not realise that separate electricity generation and distribution will mean that each company will have a financial incentive to promote energy sales rather than energy savings, which is what we should be looking for?

What will happen to the overseas department? What institutional protection will be given to the consumer against increases in cost in a position which will be monopolistic? More particularly, and on a more immediate matter, what protection will there be for power workers who, once they are employed by privately owned companies, may come under increasing threat from paramilitary forces?

The right hon. Gentleman's proposals are irrelevant to the economic, social and industrial needs of Northern Ireland consumers. The Secretary of State has already announced the fattening up of the industry by increasing electricity prices last week to make it more attractive for privatisation. However, there is one consolation for the people of Northern Ireland—the time scale proposed by the Government. The incoming Labour Government will have the support of all the parties in Northern Ireland in abandoning these disastrous proposals and working together for an efficient energy policy that will benefit private and industrial consumers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) embarked upon his remarks with a directness which made clear where his views lay. He referred to the congruity of the views of his party and the parties in Northern Ireland, in opposition to these proposals.

Since a central purpose of the proposals is to exercise a downward influence on prices, which will be beneficial to all consumers, the hon. Gentleman will have a little difficulty in explaining why he is acting in the interests of the general electorate.

In terms of the nature of the system, the purpose of our proposals is essentially competitive, and we shall see the benefits of competition that have resulted from previous privatisation exercises.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a question about the assets of Northern Ireland Electricity. I can confirm that those assets, at the time of the last balance sheet on 31 March last year, stood at about £400 million.

In terms of the flotation, the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the opportunity to purchase shares will be in transmission, distribution and supply—that part of NIE that remains. However, the implications of the rhetoric that he deployed in terms of the percentage of NIE owned by individuals in Northern Ireland, in the fullest sense, also reflect his observations about the relationship of the generation of power in Northern Ireland to the generation of power in the whole country.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the advice that the Government have received. We are at one with our advisers about our proposals, and I expect the board of NIE to support them as well. The interconnector and the gas pipeline are currently under negotiation. If it were possible to draw on the resources for future power generation, new owners would be able to consider doing so.

I shall shortly be announcing the name of the successor to Dr. Schierbeek, to whose chairmanship I pay tribute.

The hon. Gentleman asked about conservation. The new arrangements will, of course, be subject to all the conservation rules to which the present arrangements are subject. He also asked about the overseas department. Such matters will flow from decisions made by the new management as and when transactions have occurred.

I think that, in expressing confidence that all the proposals that I have announced will be set aside by a Labour victory, the hon. Gentleman is counting his chickens a little early.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I think that the Secretary of State is the only person who believes that the proposals will bring competition to Northern Ireland. In

the absence of members of the Democratic Unionist Party and the SDLP, I can confidently speak for them and say that all Northern Ireland parties will oppose this charade.

Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the former chairman of NIE, Dr. Schierbeek, resigned because he too opposed the proposals? When we have had to put up with cartels operated through the banks for years, does he expect us to believe that a half-monopoly—two private-sector companies operating generation in Northern Ireland—will provide a better service than a public monopoly? Northern Ireland industry and Northern Ireland consumers have been crucified. Northern Ireland Electricity has declared both a £90 million profit and a huge hike for next year's prices. We shall be subjected to even worse by profit-motivated private companies in the future. This is a disaster.

I sincerely hope that the consultation period stretches over 12 weeks, because the Government will learn their lesson if they decide to go to the country within the next 12 weeks.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman was more convincing in his statement about the possible opposition of Northern Ireland parties to the Government's proposals than in explaining why those proposals will not have the same competitive benefits as they have had elsewhere.

I have paid tribute to Dr. Schierbeek's chairmanship of NIE.

The hon. Gentleman called for the continuation of a public monopoly. He will be aware of the frequency with which he and his hon. Friends have called for what is effectively a degree of public subsidy for Northern Ireland electricity prices. We are determined to secure lower prices through the vehicle of competition. To say that consumers have been crucified reflects on the past pattern of behaviour rather than on our proposals. The hon. Gentleman also referred to profit. His observations show some clairvoyance, as the financial year has not yet come to an end.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Secretary of State is aware, judging by what he has just said, that electricity prices in Northern Ireland for domestic consumers and for industry are far higher than the average in the rest of the United Kingdom. I would welcome any proposal that would reduce that heavy burden on people in Northern Ireland, especially retired people who live in all-electric homes.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that I have grave doubts about whether the measure will reduce prices? Will he assure us that, when electricity is privatised, it will not only bring prices down but keep them down? I fear that, once electricity is privatised, the shareholder will come first and the consumer a poor second.

Finally——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Kilfedder: —in order to provide real competition, will he provide a gas pipeline between the mainland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: I acknowledged in my answer to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) the pattern of prices in the past. That is one reason why we are trying to gain the benefits of competition—in order to bring those prices down in the future. The hon. Gentleman said that he has grave doubts, but it would be an unusual occurrence, in view of previous privatisations, if competition did not provide the beneficent influence that it has in other cases.

The hon. Gentleman asked about prices being kept down some way down the road. I am confident that that is more likely to happen some way down the road, when there are further opportunities for supplying competition. The hon. Gentleman fears that the profits would be garnered by the industry and not shared with the consumer, but the regulator would exercise just that balance. As I said earlier, we are engaged in investigating the pipeline.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Is the Secretary of State completely committed to what is clearly a matter of ideology rather than rationality, or is he saying that, if the consultative process results in wholesale opposition to his view from all parties and their representatives in Northern Ireland and from those informed about the industry, the Government will think again?

Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the specific question about the reason for the resignation of Dr. Schierbeek as chairman and the real effect on costs? If costs are 30 per cent. higher in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom—as is widely believed—is the Secretary of State saying that costs will come down by that amount? Given that the extra cost of getting rid of emissions is to be charged additionally to consumers over the next decade, presumably they will have to pay for that.

Mr. Brooke: If, in propounding the benefits of competition, I am regarded by the hon. Gentleman and his party as guilty of dogma, on behalf of my party, I happily plead guilty. The hon. Gentleman is correct that there will be a consultative period and there will be an opportunity for those who take a different view from the Government to demonstrate that the competitive results that I have forecast will not have the benign consequences that I mentioned.

Dr. Schierbeek had a contractual relationship with Northern Ireland Electricity which had come to a particular point. It is true that there will be a massive exercise in advance of carrying through the Government's proposals.

The hon. Gentleman referred to prices. I shall correspond with him on that, since he quoted a figure that I do not readily recognise.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I draw the House's attention to the fact that we have a busy day ahead of us and that many hon. Members wish to participate in the Budget debate? May we have brief questions? During the three-month period, we shall certainly be able to discuss this matter.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whether the proposals are right or wrong, they will be seen in Northern Ireland as colonialism? If he wants to keep in touch with opinion in Northern Ireland, would not it be better to restore local government and get a better feel of what the community thinks?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend makes a delicious flank attack on me, and I know of his interests in the

[Mr. Brooke]

matter. I do not think that I would accept his premise. Both the private and the industrial consumer in Northern Ireland should receive energy supplies at the lowest possible price, and that is the Government's principal motivation.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): What about possible ownership from outside the United Kingdom? If, for example, the Electricity Supply Board in Dublin sought to purchase the NIE, there would be nothing to prevent it.

Mr. Brooke: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's question. It would be inappropriate to prejudge the outcome of the tender competition to purchase power stations. *[Interruption.]* I will take this at dictation speed. Each bid will be examined on its merits, but I assure hon. Members that the public interest, in the widest sense, will be taken into account.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that he was dissatisfied with the efficiency of Northern Ireland Electricity, because of the cost of the electricity it produces. As the Government have run Northern Ireland Electricity for 10 or 11 years, will the right hon. Gentleman now resign because of the grave inefficiency that he has admitted? If he is so anxious to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity, this would be the supreme chance for him to introduce a Bill. Why does he not do so?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman makes the seductive suggestion that I should resign over the provision of electricity. The Government's intention—this is quite deliberate—is to improve on the previous record by introducing competition into the system.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if his misguided proposal goes ahead, there will be nothing to safeguard the continued use of high-quality Ayrshire coal, which is vital not only to the Ayrshire coalfield but to Ayr harbour?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman has been pressing Ministers for some time on the subject of Ayrshire coal. Decisions on the future design of power generation in the Province will be in the hands of the operators, but I should be surprised if Ayrshire coal did not prove competitive in the exercise. I am greatly distressed that the hon. Gentleman thinks that Ayrshire coal needs a crutch or prop to sustain it.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Does the Secretary of State recognise that the Ulster Unionist party created the state industry of Northern Ireland Electricity and is proud of NIE's service to Northern Ireland? Does he accept that all the Northern Ireland parties in the House are against his proposal?

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why he will not allow the House to debate the proposals in a normal parliamentary manner? Why does he intend to force them through the House by means of an Order in Council, rather than having a proper parliamentary debate on a Bill on a process that vitally affects all sections of Northern Ireland? Why does the Secretary of State oppose cross-community relations in Northern Ireland when the whole community is united on this matter?

Why is this not a normal privatisation? Why will shares not be floated to the public? Why is the sale restricted to tenders from the limited firms in a position to tender for such stations? Is it true that one of the firms already created is led by the president of the new Northern Ireland Conservative party?

Will the Secretary of State reconsider the idea of privatising power stations that belong to Northern Ireland by restricting the sale to a few selected companies, and instead—if privatisation is to be forced upon us—give us the same type of privatisation as has happened elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman is of course quite right to take the credit for the previous actions of the Ulster Unionist party in creating the industry. I find somewhat at variance the periodic criticisms by members of his party of the price charged for electricity in the Province and the suggestion that it would be better if that price was otherwise. That seems to me to be sporadic pride.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) asked about the Order in Council; I must apologise to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) because I did not answer his question about that. All hon. Members will be aware that the privatisation of the industry in Northern Ireland is essentially a transferred matter under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, and such measures are generally dealt with by an Order in Council.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked why we were not following a normal privatisation process. I must stress that the generators will be sold by tender to not fewer than two independent companies. The balance of NIE will be sold by a flotation to the wider public. The restructuring that gives rise to the different treatment is taking place to introduce the competition to which I have consistently referred in my replies today.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State elaborate on the significance of the interconnector? What are the prospects of public finance for the interconnector, in view of its importance for electricity generation in Scotland and the Scottish coal industry? Is it not a trifle absurd to go forward with what amounts to half a prospectus without a proper evaluation of the cost benefit of such a link between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain?

Mr. Brooke: I have consistently said in answers on this statement that the idea of an interconnector with the Scottish industry is now being pursued energetically, discussed and negotiated. While those negotiations obviously need to be commercially sensible, I sincerely hope that future suppliers of power generation in the Province will have the widest possible variety of options available to them, and that also applies to the gas pipeline.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Why has there just been an 8·5 per cent. increase in electricity prices in Northern Ireland? Were not prices raised, to the detriment of consumers there, to fatten up the electricity companies for the privatisation that has just been announced? Why can we not have normal procedures for

this legislation so that it can be amended in the House? The recent emergency legislation for Northern Ireland was not made by Order in Council. We do not have to have Orders in Council for this kind of legislation.

Mr. Brooke: The implication of the hon. Gentleman's question related to the level of profits that NIE declared last year. However, in terms of current costs, those profits amounted to £4 million. As it is known that further power generation will be necessary in the Province in the near future, the reconstruction of the industry is difficult to contemplate if the profits are only £4 million per year.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we get it quite clear? Is it true that the Northern Ireland electricity board, the consultants to the board, the first opinion of the Government's own advisers, Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte, Dr. Desmond Lorimer, the next chairman, and Dr. Schierbeek, the former chairman, all opposed privatisation in the form outlined by the Secretary of State today? Why do the Government believe that those people are wrong and the Government are right? This matter will inevitably come before the Public Accounts Committee. Get it right.

Mr. Brooke: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's rather long list of questions is no. In terms of the proposition that I have put forward, I said that there was no conflict between the Government and their advisers. As I said, I am confident that the board of Northern Ireland Electricity will support what we propose.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Why can we not have legislation when the Minister knows that the powers of delegated legislation are scrutinised wholly inadequately? To undertake such a major policy by anything other than primary legislation is an abuse of the House.

Can the Secretary of State assure us that the chairman of the Northern Ireland Conservative party will not be involved in any financial dealings whatsoever with the privatisation, that no contributor to Conservative party funds will be allowed to tender, and that no contributor to Conservative party funds will be allowed to promote the scheme, be involved in merchant bank funding for the scheme, or be involved in any other way? If the Secretary of State cannot give that assurance, it will appear to people outside to be a clear case of political corruption.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is a respected authority on our legislative procedures. There will be an opportunity for full consultation on the Government's proposals for the privatisation of NIE, which may also be debated in the Northern Ireland Committee, if hon. Members request it, before the order is laid before Parliament. I hope that such an opportunity will be available.

On the questions that several hon. Members have asked about the Conservative party in Northern Ireland, it has been my experience that, on a series of issues, the Conservative party in Northern Ireland has regularly been in disagreement with the Secretary of State, and, perhaps with the single exception this afternoon, more frequently than any other politicians in Northern Ireland. I shall certainly pay attention to its views and to its position, but, in the past, its complaint has been that I have been paying insufficient attention to it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. John D. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I will take Mr. Skinner's question first.

Mr. Skinner: Does not the Secretary of State realise that one of the reasons why hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies are against the measure is that they can see what has happened to the privatisation of electricity in Great Britain? They see prices going through the roof, and they do not want any more of it. As for the Secretary of State's remarks about subsidies not being applicable to Northern Ireland, perhaps hon. Members from Northern Ireland will say that what is good enough for Wandsworth's subsidies is good enough for them.

Mr. Brooke: I think that this is the first time that Wandsworth has been injected into one of our Northern Ireland debates, but they do range widely. The Government's preoccupation is with getting prices down in Northern Ireland and making them competitive not only with Great Britain but with the rest of Europe, because, in the Europe after 1992, it will be peculiarly important that Northern Ireland should be able to compete on a level playing field.

Mr. John D. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When hon. Members on these Benches asked for a Bill rather than an Order in Council so that we could have a proper debate on the measure and the right to table amendments, the Secretary of State kindly responded by saying that a debate could take place in the Northern Ireland Committee if we so requested it. Is that not somewhat misleading, in that, even if the order went before the Committee, we would not be allowed to table amendments? That would not be in accordance with the normal parliamentary rights that hon. Members should have.

Mr. Speaker: I have no responsibility for Select Committees, but I understand that that is the case.

Lewis Group

4.9 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the loss of 1,500 jobs in the Lewis Group of retail stores".

The Lewis group recently went into receivership and Grant Thornton, the accountants, was appointed the receivers. Grant Thornton is set to make a deal of sale of five of the stores with Owen Owen, a retail stores group, which will result in the loss of 1,500 jobs.

The matter is urgent for the simple reason that that deal will be made on Friday and any opportunity for further bids will be prevented. The receivers, Grant Thornton, are giving inadequate consideration to the offer of a management buy-out which is backed by substantial funds from Shire Trust and other venture capital funds to purchase all 10 of the remaining stores in the group and the warehouse and head office, thus preserving the 1,500 jobs. It is likely that, if Owen Owen is allowed to purchase the stores, the result will be job losses in Liverpool among my own constituents, and at the remaining stores in Preston, Blackpool, Leicester, Thurrock and Glasgow, as it is unlikely that they will attract buyers.

The purchaser, Owen Owen, backed by Capital and Counties Plc, wants only five stores, three of which are in Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. The company already owns a store in Liverpool and, as a consequence, there is a great fear in the north-west that the Lewis's store could be sold, with great job losses. There would be no need for the Liverpool head office and warehouses to be retained, but they would be required by the management buy-out team, which would protect a large proportion of the jobs.

The receiver was appointed by the National Westminster and Lloyds banks, both of which, it is calculated, will recover their indebtedness from the management buy-out deal. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason why all those who are interested should not be given an adequate opportunity to bid for the stores.

We in the north-west have suffered a recession in the past—in the early 80s—when we fought to retain jobs. It is vital that we continue to fight. It is under those circumstances that I seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely

"the break-up of the Lewis Group and the loss of 1,500 jobs"

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman has said. He knows that I have to decide whether to give that matter precedence over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. In this case, I regret that the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Reserve Free Travel Scheme (London)

4.12 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the London Regional Transport Act 1984 and to make other provision in respect of the reserve free travel scheme for certain categories of London residents.

When you announced your retirement the other week, Mr. Speaker, many hon. Members paid tribute to you. The difference between us London Labour Members and a lot of the other Members who have paid tribute to you is that we would like to give you a parting gift, and my parting gift to you is this Bill, which will offer you a free travel pass in London for the rest of what I hope will be your very long life.

The VAT rise in the Budget will hurt a lot of pensioners' pockets—but perhaps not your own, Mr. Speaker. At the very least, Parliament should assure those pensioners that they will continue to have concessionary travel arrangements. The purpose of my Bill is to obtain better travel pass arrangements for pensioners, to improve them and to guarantee for years to come that London pensioners will have a free travel pass.

I should like to give the House a brief history of the scheme. In April 1971, the London Boroughs Association began to co-ordinate a concessionary fares scheme for the elderly to allow them to travel at child rates, but only on buses. Some individual boroughs had local discretion over the criterion for eligibility. Subsequently, in September 1973, the Greater London council took over those arrangements and widened the concessionary fares scheme to blind and disabled people, and offered free travel to all people of pensionable age. Gradually, the scheme was extended further, to include free travel on London Country buses, half fare on Green line buses and half fare on British Rail from 1983. The scheme also operated for longer hours. It was extended to the underground in 1976 at a 20p flat fare, which became free in June 1981.

Unfortunately, the GLC was abolished by the Government. Only after immense lobbying by London pensioners and a threatened rebellion by Conservative Back-Bench Members during the passage of the London Regional Transport Act 1984 was the free fare scheme saved and the statutory reserve scheme introduced.

The problem is that the reserve scheme is not as good as the scheme which is in operation. It would take only one London local authority to back out—several Tory councils have threatened to do that in the past—for the current arrangements to collapse. In addition, local authorities have found that the cost of the scheme, now running at £110 million, has been rising beyond their control, because LRT has set fare rises well above inflation and has charged councils the equivalent for pensioners' travel. That problem is building up for local authorities.

If the current scheme collapses and we go over to the reserve scheme, there will be a worse service for London pensioners. For example, the reserve scheme does not provide any travel concessions on British Rail. It would start at 9.30 am on weekdays instead of 9 am. The period for which free travel is offered under the reserve scheme could be varied by London Transport under section 51(7) of the Act. London Transport might well vary it, for example, by getting rid of the free travel aspect.

Paragraph 51 of "A Bus Strategy for London", brought out by London Transport, says:

"One option for change from the existing reserve scheme would be to specify the scheme in legislation only for the first year of operation. After that there would still be a reserve scheme, but it could be deemed to be whatever scheme was in force the previous year, rather than automatically reverting to a free scheme, as now."

The implication is clear: the free scheme could go in those circumstances.

In addition, the element of local discretion for boroughs under the National Assistance Act 1948 would go, and that could have repercussions for some, including the mentally ill. The reserve scheme would be more expensive. For example, airbus travel would have to be included and charged to London authorities. London Transport would decide the charges and impose them on the boroughs.

My Bill seeks to ensure that if the scheme operated by the London boroughs fails, the reserve scheme, which is guaranteed in law, will give London pensioners the same concessions as they get now, which include BR travel and the earlier starting time to which I have referred.

I am also trying to improve the existing scheme by offering free travel instead of half fare on British Rail and on Green line buses within London. The whole scheme needs to be examined to counter the threat to pensioners' passes because of the Government's deregulation plans.

To summarise the aims of the Bill, the service to pensioners should be improved, the reserve scheme should be as good as the current scheme which is operated voluntarily by local authorities, the Secretary of State's power should be limited only to being able to improve the scheme for users and to help allay some of the costs, and LRT's responsibility for setting charges to local authorities should be limited to the equivalent of fare rises or the inflation rate, whichever is the lower. On top of that, the contribution which the local authorities have to pay for the pass should not be counted in any poll tax capping or other capping arrangements introduced in future.

The Bill deals specifically with London, but I am not concerned only about London. I am not parochial about these matters. I want free travel arrangements for pensioners to be extended to all local authority areas. There should be a statutory reserve scheme in those areas in case Tory local authorities start taking away the concessions which are already provided in those areas.

My Bill has the support of pensioners and travel organisations. For example, Age Concern said:

"an acceptable minimum level of service would be the currently voluntary scheme."

A representative of the London regional passengers committee is quoted as saying that a main concern was to ensure the continuation of concessions already achieved.

The pensioners' pass is safe for this year, because the general election is looming, but after that it will be at considerable risk. It comes up for review in December this year. As I said at the beginning of my speech, all Londoners want the problems to be sorted out early. That is what my Bill seeks to do. It would guarantee pensioners a free travel pass well into the 21st century, so that London pensioners—including you, Mr. Speaker—can enjoy it well into their dotage.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in this excellent Bill?

Mr. Cohen *rose—*

Hon. Members: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cohen: Yes, perhaps Mr. Speaker.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Cohen, Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Tom Cox, Mr. John Fraser, Ms. Mildred Gordon, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. Ron Leighton. Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mr. Peter Shore and Mr. Nigel Spearing.

RESERVE FREE TRAVEL SCHEME (LONDON)

Mr. Cohen accordingly presented a Bill to amend the London Regional Transport Act 1984 and to make other provision in respect of the reserve free travel scheme for certain categories of London residents: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 116.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [19 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax, otherwise than by virtue of goods or services supplied to one person being treated for the purposes of section 14(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 as supplied to another person;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant document: European Community document No. 4433/91 on the Annual Economic Report 1990-91.]

4.22 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): A Budget is not just about revenues and fiscal policy. It provides an opportunity for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make an important statement about the management of the economy and to assess the prospects for the future. It has been noticeable that this Government have used forecasts about our economy ruthlessly and irresponsibly to conceal the real trends in economic performance by always painting a reassuring picture about future prospects. However depressing is the reality of today, happy days are promised for just round the corner. Hence, in this Budget statement we are told that recovery from deep recession is imminent and, indeed, is assured to happen as soon as next year.

The Government's technique has become familiar because this is not the first assurance that we have had about prospective economic improvement. After all, we were told not so long ago that, as part of the miraculous economic achievement, the scourge of inflation had been eradicated. In his 1988 Budget statement, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), whom the Chancellor apparently regards as his mentor, told us:

"It is a testimony to the soundness of our policies that the present strong and sustained upswing, unlike almost all its predecessors, has not led to any resurgence of inflation."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1988; Vol. 129, c. 994.]

The right hon. Gentleman was not alone. The then Chief Secretary—the present Prime Minister—told us in the autumn statement debate of that year:

"Inflation is low and will remain so".—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. 549.]

We know now, of course, that they were both completely wrong. Inflation doubled, rising to more than 10 per cent. last year. So much for Conservative assurances about the prospects for inflation. Even as it rose relentlessly, it was described as a "temporary blip".

Similarly, we had expansive assurances that recession would not occur, that any pause in the economy would be—to quote the present Chancellor—"shallow and short-lived". Of course, good news is always predicted. Any disturbing tendency is minimised, or concealed by a fresh declaration of confidence, hard on the heels of the last disappointment. A classic of this genre appeared in last year's Budget statement, when the then Chancellor told us that, whatever had been the problems of 1990, we could be confident about good times in 1991. He said:

"Growth should return in 1991 towards its sustainable rate of around 2¼ per cent. I am confident that the period of low growth will be short lived."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990, Vol. 169, c. 1011.]

That statement is characteristic of the present Prime Minister. In the Red Book he published a growth figure of 1·5 per cent., but he could not restrain himself from hinting that it might be 2·75 per cent. It would take a Chicago lawyer to get at the real meaning of this remark:

"Growth should return in 1991 towards its sustainable rate of 2¼ per cent."

What on earth does that mean? However, it is typical of the Prime Minister that he should publish one figure in the Red Book and, in his statement to the House of Commons, hint that the situation might be much better. But it does not really matter what he intended to say. He was right about at least one thing: growth was short-lived. There was none at all. Far from growing at anything like 2 per cent., the economy slid into recession.

But exactly the same rose-tinted forecast was made by the then Chief Secretary, who is now the Chancellor. Concluding his speech in last year's Budget debate, he made this ringing declaration:

"Pain there may be, but gain there will also be. By this time next year, the prospects will be distinctly brighter. [*Official Report*, 21 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1142.]

Here we are, one year later—[AN HON. MEMBER: "The prospects have been brighter for him."] They have been a little bit brighter for him. There were some ups and downs on the way, and I gather that there is a continuing argument between the right hon. Gentleman and his predecessor as Prime Minister as to what precisely was his role in these events. However, perhaps I should not inquire too closely into matters of private grief—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may get more attention for that sedentary intervention than he planned. I can tell him that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) keeps a careful eye on all that is happening. I think that the hon. Gentleman is trying to take some of the heat off the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Come to think of it, he looks a bit like a lightning conductor.

As one reads earlier debates, one finds that some feelings that have obviously been kept under tight control for a very long time are beginning to peep out. *[Interruption.]* Someone says that Conservative Members are glad that the right hon. Member for Finchley has gone. Unfortunately, he did not get as good a reward as did the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, now holds one of the senior positions in the Government. I must not be diverted by the seated interjections of members of the Government Front Bench, however entertaining they may be.

We must examine the brighter prospects that we are enjoying this year compared with last year's Budget forecasts. In last year's Red Book, it was predicted that in the first half of 1991 there would be growth of 1·5 per cent. Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer told us that it would fall by 2 per cent. We were told last year in the Red Book that manufacturing output in 1991 would increase by 0·75 per cent. Yesterday, that estimate was revised to minus 5 per cent. Last year, fixed investment in 1991 was expected to decline slightly, by 0·75 per cent. Yesterday, it was reduced massively to the almost unprecedented level of nearly 10 per cent.—9·75 per cent. to be precise.

Do the new and grim forecasts for 1991 reveal the distinctly brighter prospects that were promised 12 months ago by the then Chief Secretary, who is now the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Since that Budget, unemployment has increased by almost 400,000. Is that another feature of the brighter prospects that were promised last year for the year that lay ahead?

We see from the repeated contradictions between promise and performance how thin is the credibility to be attached to any forecast about anything in the economy that comes from Ministers of this Government. Let us keep at the forefront of our minds when considering their blithe asssertions the fact that, after heading sharply downwards, the economy will suddenly recover to growth of 2 per cent. in time for the last available date for the next general election. What a happy statistical coincidence. What a wonderful world we live in when we can create on the basis of bogus predictions and misdeclarations about the economy.

It was surely significant that the Chancellor of the Exchequer drew our attention to the severe penalties that were attached last year by the Government to incorrect declarations in the value added tax system. The present Chancellor of the Exchequer reminded us yesterday that especially severe penalties had been introduced for those who persistently made inaccurate financial returns. The right hon. Gentleman referred specifically to the serious misdeclaration penalty which was introduced in April 1990. His experience since then appears to have given him a special sympathy for the miscreants to whom the penalty was directed. He told us that there had been widespread protest that the penalty was too severe. I give the Chancellor of the Exchequer credit for realising that it was wholly inappropriate to impose such a penalty on those whose misdeclarations were minor matters compared with the gross misdeclarations about the economy that Ministers have made year after year.

Whatever the Government try to do, the facts eventually catch up with them. Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was noticeably reticent about some key economic indicators. Not a word did he say to the House about the estimate for fixed investment for 1991. The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor told us last year that fixed investment would decline by slightly less than 1 per cent. The forecast that the present Chancellor of the Exchequer has been obliged to print in the Red Book reveals, as I have already said, that the forecast for 1991 is a precipitate fall of almost 10 per cent. Why, we wonder, was that omitted from the Chancellor's Budget presentation yesterday and, indeed, from his television broadcast last night? Come to that, the right hon. Gentleman made no reference to the projected fall in manufacturing output. It was forecast a year ago that it would increase by almost 1 per cent., yet it is now expected to drop by as much as 5 per cent.

These are, for the Government, embarrassing indicators of what is happening in the real economy and of the depth and seriousness of the economic recession that afflicts our nation. At least it seems to be accepted that there is a recession. I have no doubt that that is only because it can no longer plausibly be denied—not that the Government did not try to do that as well. In December 1989, the present Prime Minister scoffed at the notion that there would be a recession at all. He said in a speech to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce:

"I do not believe myself that a recession is either likely or necessary."

Not to be outdone, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, after being cornered by the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service, and having to accept that there was indeed a recession, told us that it would be "shallow and short-lived".

Let us ponder for a moment the now admitted fact that investment will fall by 10 per cent.—as far as I can discover, an unprecedentedly bad prediction. Investment is the seed corn of economic progress, yet here in Conservative Britain it is falling through the floor. Ominously for us, that is not happening elsewhere. The latest figures of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that all the other members of the Group of Seven are maintaining positive and superior levels of growth in investment.

Investment is vital for economic recovery, particularly in the context of the single market after 1992. It does not seem to worry the Government that in other European countries 1991 is a year of preparation and investment. In Tory Britain it is a year of cuts and decline. That is why we in the Labour party called for a Budget for investment and for recovery. That is why we proposed lower interest rates and a package of investment incentives for manufacturing industry. The Government felt obliged to make reductions in corporation tax—no doubt because of the parlous condition of so many smaller companies as a result of the recession and the years of high interest rates. We should have preferred the fiscal relaxation to have been targeted on the stimulation of investment in the manufacturing sector which, after all, is the crucial wealth creator and the most internationally tradeable part of the economy.

We also proposed a major investment in training, another area of policy which, like manufacturing, seems not to concern the Chancellor of the Exchequer very much. We proposed that the foolish cuts in the training budget of £245 million should be reversed. How can the Government justify those cuts when we have skill shortages in the midst of sharply rising unemployment and when we are now in the most absurd of all situations, putting trainers on to the dole?

We also recognised the human problem as well as the economic waste of rising unemployment, up by 85,000 last month alone or more than 4,000 lost jobs for every working day of the month. We proposed to tackle that by a temporary employment scheme to provide both work opportunity and training for the growing number of our citizens without work. Our proposals in this regard would have cost £340 million, and we would have invested £300 million in a new skills fund to provide much-needed extra resources for the training and enterprise councils and non-statutory training organisations.

The only acknowledgement of any training need in this Budget was the tax allowance for individual training costs at an estimated cost to the Treasury during 1992-93 of £20

[Mr. John Smith]

million. Such a sum shows how totally inadequate is the Government's appreciation of the scale of the training disaster that our country has suffered in the Conservative years.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I have been trying to follow closely the argument of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Is it implicit in what he has just said that the previous undertaking given, I think, by him and the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—that the only areas of public expenditure which would be expanded under a future Labour Government were child benefit and pensions—will be extended to cover increased expenditure on these other worthy purposes to do with training? If so, what items of public expenditure does he intend to reduce to make room for those increases?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) should have read some of the proposals that we published last week. First, he misrepresents what my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said. We indicated the priority that we attach to certain items of expenditure, but we did not exclude the possibility that we would enter into proposals for other areas of expenditure.

That was why I drew the hon. Gentleman's attention —I could not have done so more specifically—to the precise sums in our proposal. I hope that he does not think that I did that just for fun. I did so to show the House that we were entering into a commitment to achieve precisely that end. He should consider why on earth the Government whom he supports do not enter into a similar commitment to tackle our training problems. Surely a man of his perception, knowledge and experience of such matters knows that we have a training disaster in this country. What does he do about it—does he merely wring his hands and say that there is nothing that he can do about it?

Mr. Forman: The answer to the nation's training needs is to be found in the TECs, which are going ahead very satisfactorily—*[Interruption]*—and the sensible tax relief proposed for individual training.

Mr. Smith: I do not wish to be disrespectful to the hon. Gentleman, who tries to make a helpful contribution to our debates, but he should have listened to what I was saying. I drew attention to the Budget proposals for tax relief for people on individual training programmes, but I said that £20 million—not this year, but the year after next —is hardly an adequate response to the scale of Britain's training problems.

The hon. Gentleman referred to TECs. Does not he know that almost all the TEC chairmen protest loudly that they have been given responsibilities by the Government without being given the resources to carry them out, and have recruited various people from the private sector to contribute to the TECs, who discover on arrival that there is no money for them to carry forward the programme? My constituency is suffering from that very problem. The Government amalgamated the Scottish Development Agency and the Training Agency into a new organisation, Scottish Enterprise, and set up many local enterprise companies. The one that affects my constituency, Lanarkshire Development Agency, has had to cut the training programme that had already been promised. Its first job is to deliver the bad news that the Secretary of State for Employment lost the argument with the Chancellor on the previous autumn statement figures. That is why, unhappily, money is being cut from training. I hope that, when he reflects on it, the hon. Gentleman will see that there is a great deal of wisdom in what we are saying.

There are some proposals in the Budget——

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I wonder whether, before the right hon. and learned Gentleman hastily moves on from Labour's shadow Budget—*[Interruption.]* He would have been wise to move hastily because he will know that I have been asking the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to explain the major balancing item in the shadow Budget, an alleged saving of £619 million by withdrawing the personal pensions incentive. That could be done only by taking back money to which people already have a legal entitlement and wrecking 4 million personal pensions. Is that the Opposition's policy?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that was one of the changes that we proposed. Our proposals clearly suggested that the bribe for people to enter personal pension schemes should not be continued. The precise figure—which I understand the right hon. Gentleman also contests—was supplied by his Department in a parliamentary answer. On the whole, we should be entitled to rely on that. That is the answer.

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman might ask me whether I am prepared to give way. I have not assented to give way and it is slightly arrogant to wander up to the Dispatch Box without asking the speaker if he will give way.

Mr. Newton: The £619 million included in the shadow Budget is money to which people already have a legal entitlement and most of which has probably been paid in respect of contributions that they have already made. Is that or is that not to be withdrawn?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman should know perfectly well that, since that proposal was introduced by the present Government, the Labour party has said that it would be one of our ambitions to withdraw it. We are merely proposing once again that that bribe should not be continued.

The right hon. Gentleman's other shot at this subject was to try to say that we had dropped our commitment to uprate old-age pensions according to prices or earnings, whichever was the higher. We do not have to repeat that commitment on every occasion because it is so clearly understood by the public and the House as one of the Labour party's major commitments.

The right hon. Gentleman asked why we included proposals for child benefit. That was because they are highly relevant to Budgets in which child tax allowance used to be a feature. It looks as though we did some good by putting it into the shadow Budget because the Chancellor appeared to listen to what we said in our proposals.

I must move on to the other proposals——

Mr. Newton: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman cannot complain because I have given way to him twice. He asked two absurd questions to which he has received adequate answers.

There are other items in the Budget, some of which my right hon. and hon. Friends will be disposed to welcome as the Labour party has, for many years, campaigned for them. I shall draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to one. It seems at last to be recognised, at least for future conduct—I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will pay attention to this because it affects his Department—that a potential Conservative Government would uprate child benefit according to the inflation rate.

It is hard to believe that the Government are seeking congratulation on the abandonment of a posture of unfairness and obduracy that no Government should ever have contemplated, let alone pursued. They know full well that they broke an all-party understanding that child benefit—the product of the amalgamation of family allowance and child tax allowance—would be regularly updated in the same way as a normal tax allowance. In addition, they were perfidiously misleading in their shameful manifesto reference to the subject at the last election. Even now, when a sense of penitence on their part should have led them to make good the entire shortfall of the freeze, we have a proposal merely to increase the first child's benefit by £1, while the increase for other children is limited to a miserly 25p—all of which will not be paid, as I understand it, until October of this year. The Labour party proposed that the increase should take child benefit up to £9·55 for all children. Clearly, it will be left to the next Labour Government to put right an injustice which has been only partially, if revealingly, acknowledged in this year's Budget.

There are other items, such as the changes in mortgage tax relief——

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman should ask me whether I am prepared to give way. I think that he is clearly ambitious to join Treasury Ministers. I shall give way to him for one last time, but he must understand that I am being generous in giving way to him so frequently.

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge that, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman might acknowledge that the biggest single proposed item of expenditure in the shadow Budget was social security expenditure, to which I am about to come, and that the biggest single item of saving was the personal pensions incentive, to which I have referred.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made a number of points on child benefit. I should like his comments on a point that I have put to him and his right hon. Friends —*[Interruption.]* The proposal that the right hon. and learned Gentleman put in his shadow Budget is costed in such a way that 1 million families on income support, and with more than 2 million children, would have gained no benefit. The proposals that my right hon. Friend announced yesterday give full benefit to all parts of the population, including the poorest. The document that he published——

Hon. Members: Come on.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Haynes: This is disgraceful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You should have stopped the Secretary of State for Social Security. He is abusing the procedures of the House of Commons. He will have an opportunity to speak in a day or two's time.

Mr. Newton: My question is simply this: is it or is it not Labour party policy, as costed in the shadow Budget, to spend £750 million on child benefit while giving no help to the poorest families on income support?

Mr. Smith: I fear that I cannot congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on a capacity for brevity. Having patiently listened for quite a long time to his third intervention, I believe that it is an abuse of the generosity that I have extended to him——

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): How about answering the question?

Mr. Smith: I will answer the question in my own way and in my own time. The Opposition are well used to abuse from Conservative Back-Benchers, but I see that it has moved forward.

I give a straight answer. The difference between the Opposition and the Government is that we would have increased child benefit properly and they did not. That is what it is all about. Had there been a Labour Government, child benefit would be £9·55 per week for each child. That is not the case under the Government. If the right hon. Gentleman wanted to show support for the poorest people in our society, he has had plenty of opportunity to do so during his period in office.

As I was endeavouring to say, there are other items, such as the change in mortgage tax relief, which the Opposition support and which have long been resisted by the Government. Imitation is, in many ways, the sincerest form of flattery and I suggest that for guidance and enlightenment the Conservative party would be well advised to read the Labour party's policy statements with care and attention. [HON. MEMBERS: "We have."] I am glad to hear it. If they read them with a more open mind than heretofore, they will find some extremely attractive, eminently sensible and much-needed proposals to create the strong economy and the fair society to which an increasing number of our people aspire.

The Government are no doubt inhibited by a feeling that cheap imitation is no substitute for having policies carried out by those who believe in them and are committed to them for their worth—a view which I think will prevail in the coming decisions of the electorate.

But what caused many of the headlines following the Budget was the humiliating U-turn executed by the Government on the poll tax which was presaged by the increase in VAT of 2½ percentage points—a percentage increase of more than 16 per cent. in the tax.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have hardly said a word on this, but I will take a risk, as I did on a previous occasion, and give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Would a Labour Government reverse the transfer of local government taxation to VAT?

Mr. Smith: On the radio this morning the Chief Secretary said——

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): I was asleep.

Mr. Smith: Well, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's voice was on the radio. He probably was asleep, but I certainly heard it. He said that it would be wise for us to suspend judgment on the question of local government taxation until the Government's full proposals had been revealed.

I gather that there is some irritation among members of the Government that one of their colleagues regularly leaks information in Central Lobby. Anyone who took a wander out there a day or two ago could have seen his minions in the act. It is well known that the Secretary of State for the Environment has been leaking like a sieve the proposals that are before the Government. He does not seem to have suffered much, so no doubt he will continue to do so. Since the Government do not tell us very much, we should be grateful for the odd crumb that we get from the right hon. Gentleman.

We will consider carefully what the Government put forward and when we see the Bill—we do not even know its title—we will be able to give a considered reaction.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): If the Secretary of State for the Environment has been leaking like a sieve, why was everyone so astonished by the announcement about VAT?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman who, albeit unsuccessfully, worked assiduously for the Secretary of State for the Environment in the recent contest in the Conservative party——

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Why not answer the question?

Mr. Smith: I am asked to give advice on something that is happening in the Conservative party, not about Labour party policy. I was asked to give my opinion about what the Secretary of State for the Environment was talking about. Well, he was not actually talking about VAT. He did not get that one. But he sought to capture publicity before the Chancellor's announcement about VAT. The wicked thought crossed my mind that he was trying to bounce some of his Cabinet colleagues into taking a decision at a particular meeting by drumming up support here and there for his proposals. As far as I can see, no one in the Government is denying that that process of leaking went on. But it is for the Government to decide how Ministers behave in their Administration.

The 16 per cent. increase in that indirect tax will mean that, when we buy the wide range of goods to which the tax applies—household equipment is an obvious example—or pay for services such as in our telephone bills, we will all be paying a poll tax surcharge. It is not clear to me—unless the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) can give me an opinion—whether the VAT proposal is intended to bury the poll tax or to keep it alive.

Conservative Members know perfectly well that many among them see in the Chancellor's VAT increase a possible lifeline for the continuation of the poll tax in one form or another. But of course the House of Commons has not been shown the whole prospectus. It does not know whether the poll tax is to go or stay, what is the proposed allocation of services between central and local government or what financial burdens have been allocated and to whom. We get Budget proposals one day, we are told that a Bill will be presented on another, and although the House has not been told what the legislation contains, it is told that the normal processes of legislation will be steamrollered to suit the political convenience of a Government running hither and thither in a desperate attempt to extricate themselves from a poll tax fiasco of their own creation.

Enormous changes in the relationship between central and local government, of great significance to the balance of our constitution, are revealed in insidious leaks by the Secretary of State for the Environment and are then packaged in a panic form to be bulldozed through Parliament. Was there ever an example of more foolish or ill-considered government?

The latest burden in VAT increases is just the most recent cost of the poll tax fiasco. Hundreds of millions of pounds—I am generous in that estimate—have been wasted in the constant changes in local government administration and finance which have been imposed by the Government. The tragedy is that all the money could have been used to improve the services which local government exists to provide and which are the real victims of the Government's ludicrous incompetence.

Let it not be said, as I understand the Chancellor to claim, that the VAT increase that he proposes will not affect the cost of living. The system of retail prices indexing may be such that the effect of VAT increases can be statistically disguised, but, as many newspapers today have pointed out, that is little more than sleight of hand. The price increases will be real. They will be paid by our constituents, who will not be impressed. They are well capable of spotting another inflationary own goal coming in their direction.

Of course, the retail prices index will fall in the months ahead. That is statistically inevitable as previous price rises fall out of the calculation. One effect of flattening the economy and causing unemployment to rise is that inflation will fall. It would be wise for the House to look with some care at the detailed figures in the Red Book. The gross domestic product deflator, which measures inflation in the economy as a whole, rather than the limited bundle of goods contained in the retail prices index, remains almost unchanged, easing only from 7·75 per cent. in 1990 to 7 per cent. in 1991. That is still well above the equivalent GDP inflation rates of the other major European Community countries. Again, we must be wary of the Government's optimistic forecasts, in the light of the information buried in the statistics which they themselves have presented.

During the past 12 years the Government have indulged in the economics of the roller-coaster. We are back to the cycle of boom and bust, back to the stop, go and stop again policies which have been the chief characteristic of Conservative economic policy for decades. In the 1960s we saw the Maudling dash for growth, in the 1970s it was the Barber boom and in the 1980s the right hon. Member for Blaby and the present Prime Minister organised their own spend now, pay later credit spree.

There has been a Conservative boom and bust in each of the past three decades. Why on earth should anyone

believe that another Conservative Government in the 1990s would behave any differently from what they have done three times before?

The Budget confirms how little the Government and the Conservative party have learnt from their experience. I am sad to say that it is yet another missed opportunity. Sooner rather than later I hope that we shall elect a Government who are committed to making the breakthrough to economic success which is so desperately needed for our country in the 1990s. We need it if we are to secure our living standards and to help us build a more decent society. It will fall to that Government to present a Budget for investment and recovery. We in the Labour party look forward to that opportunity.

5.1 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor charted the course of the British economy during the next decade and proposed measures designed to help business through the current recession and to maintain the momentum of a decade of supply-side reform. He introduced proposals to make the tax system fairer and to enhance the quality of life. Finally, my right hon. Friend announced a massive switch between local and central taxation—a switch that lays the foundation for a lasting solution to the problem of local government finance.

History will show that my right hon. Friend's first Budget was right for its time, right for the economy and right for Britain, and it certainly was not dull either. That is the almost universal view of today's press, the mood of which is well summed up by the *Financial Times* which, in the opening words of its editorial, said that the Chancellor "has played a difficult hand bravely and skilfully."

What is clearly recognised in that editorial, as in so many others, is that this Budget puts the long-term health of the British economy and British business first.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: It is very early in my speech, but I shall.

Mr. Radice: As he was quoting from the *Financial Times*, the right hon. and learned Gentleman might also have quoted the article by Mr. Samuel Brittan which said that this is not a Budget for business but a Budget to reduce the poll tax. That is the truth, is it not?

Mr. Mellor: It is not. It is a Budget for business and to reduce the community charge, and it succeeds magnificently in both. I shall come to the chapter and verse. It is to the discomfiture of Opposition Members that it succeeds so well.

So far in this debate we have heard speeches from the Leader of the Opposition, who, alas, is no longer present, and the shadow Chancellor—a winning combination, the Labour party would have us believe. I do not know whether they are familiar with the old Russian proverb about partnership, of which I am irresistibly reminded when listening to both of them. The Russians say that there are two people in every partnership—the one who chops the wood and the one who does the grunting. I do not know which was which. They were hotly competing for the title of the grunter, but it will be interesting to see how both of them have shaped up in this debate.

The Leader of the Opposition's performance was quite astonishing. I have watched him, as have my hon. Friends I am sure, for some years carrying out that task. It is certainly a difficult one. It is a real ordeal to have to respond immediately to a complex Budget. It is a difficult speech to bring off and it is the particular facility of the Leader of the Opposition to make it seem impossible.

Let me make clear exactly what I mean. First, most of his speech had been typed up well beforehand. [HON. MEMBERS: "So is yours."] If ever there was the wrong speech, by the wrong writer for the wrong occasion, that was it. It is a speech that we have already heard—*[Laughter.]* Opposition Members may wish to hide their discomfiture about the performance of the Leader of the Opposition, but—*[Interruption.]* I thought that Opposition Members were supposed to be behaving well in speeches these days, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and showing us up.

I shall come to the chapter and verse of why the Leader of the Opposition was unwise not to discard his script. Everything in my script is predictable because of the predictable speech by the Leader of the Opposition, who said nothing new.

The Leader of the Opposition said that he had been listening to a "tinkering" Budget. Whatever it is, it certainly is not tinkering. I would like to hear the Leader of the Opposition's definition of a radical Budget if this is tinkering. However, it is a fitting tribute to the right hon. Gentleman's forensic skills that because his script said tinkering he continued to call it tinkering, although, as is perfectly obvious to everyone, this Budget is very different.

When it came to the spontaneous bits, the Leader of the Opposition was unable to keep up with his pre-prepared description of a tinkering Budget from a Government that he said "will not learn" because he went on to say that our child benefit proposals were "another spectacular somersault", and he had to describe the reduction in the community charge as

"the biggest climb-down in . . . political history."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 182.]

He should make up his mind—is it tinkering or a U-turn? After all, he is supposed to be the decisive one. Mind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it cannot have been easy for him. All his favourite foxes were shot—the level of the community charge, mortgage relief, offshore trusts, and company cars. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should have been congratulated merely for continuing to stand there while all those rugs were pulled out from under his feet.

I wish to return to the substance of what the Leader of the Opposition said so that I have the attention of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and to some of the matters mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, which appeared in the Labour party's shadow budget. That has exposed, once and for all, Labour's claims to be the party of fiscal responsibility. Despite saying that the child benefit proposals were another spectacular somersault, the Leader of the Opposition went on to say that he wondered that the right hon. Gentleman had "the gall to come" to the House to announce them, but those measures will cost £450 million in a full year. Indeed, when taken together with the increase that is coming into effect next month, the full year cost is more than £700 million. I should have thought that the real gall is to say that one is financially responsible and then sneer at that level of

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financial commitment. Heaven knows what would happen if the Leader of the Opposition were in charge with that sort of thinking.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: I will in a moment.

I would like to return to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security about the measures costed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman in the shadow budget. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that our proposals alter the income support level so that the poorest families, with a quarter of all children, receive the full benefit of the increase in child benefit. The right hon. and learned Gentleman sought to fudge what was said in the shadow budget. The trouble with publishing documents is that we read them and subject them to scrutiny. What do we find? We find the costing of his child benefit proposal at £775 million.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is perfectly at liberty to intervene if I have got that wrong. However, it is clear that he knows only too well that £775 million is the costing if no allowance is made for families on income support. If he was to give the full benefit to the poorest families, the total cost would be over £1 billion. Once again, the figures just do not add up.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to be studiously engaged in discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) to avoid the argument. If he wants to stand up and make it absolutely clear what he meant, I shall be happy to give way. Were the poorest quarter to be better off or not? Were the poorest quarter to have their income support varied on the right hon. and learned Gentleman's calculations or not? [HON. MEMBERS: "Silence!"] As I have said to the right hon. and learned Gentleman before, we hear plenty of quarter sessions huff and puff from him, but when we look for the beef, it simply is not there.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has published a shadow budget riddled with errors and inconsistencies. We have already exposed the hole in the middle of the child benefit proposals, but there are more. There is the repudiation, which he acknowledged this afternoon, of Beckett's law, which stated that Labour had only two priority spending pledges—pensions and child benefit. We know, and he has acknowledged, that a raft of additional measures on training, capital allowances, temporary work programmes and so on was included in the shadow budget.

When it comes to paying for all that, the whole thing begins to fall apart. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may want to clarify other points in the shadow budget, and that would be helpful to us all. First, £1 billion of the cost of the shadow budget was to come from withdrawing mortgage tax relief from top-rate taxpayers and reducing the subsidy on company cars. We have done that, and money cannot be spent twice. What is next in line? Sooner or later the right hon. and learned Gentleman may have to return to the subject that always embarrasses the Labour party so much—the level of income tax. Labour Members have been anxious not to commit themselves on that topic since the fiasco of their promise at the last election that income tax would have to go up to 29p in the pound.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. I want to deal with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's shadow budget; I shall give way after that. There will be plenty of time.

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will give way when I have finished dealing with the shadow budget. That is perfectly fair. The hon. Gentleman must be patient.

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chief Secretary has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Mellor: According to the shadow budget, £619 million for investment and recovery will come from ending the 2 per cent. personal pension incentive. That figure has a nice ring. It sounds accurate, because it is not a round figure, and some people might be taken in by it. As has been made obvious this afternoon, they should not be.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman may benefit from what I am saying next time he has a go at the same exercise. The elimination of the 2 per cent. personal pension incentive would yield, not £619 million, but about £10 million a year. Where, then, does this little pot of gold come from? As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has made clear, it comes from the retrospective removal of the 2 per cent. rebate that has already been given to 4·3 million of our fellow citizens who have opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme and taken up private pensions.

I shall make myself available to the right hon. and learned Gentleman if he wants to correct any of what I have said. I shall be happy to give way to him.

Mr. Ewing: Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. These diversionary tactics are useless. I am keeping my eye on the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will not give way. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not want to hear the rest of my argument. I shall give way to him after I have finished dealing with this passage in the shadow budget.

The retrospective removal of the 2 per cent. rebate would rob a man on average earnings of a £272 contribution to his pension scheme for this year alone, and would slash his pension contributions by £5 per week. Is that really what the Labour party wishes to do to millions of working people up and down the country?

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know better.

The Labour party is in considerable disarray on this point. I do not know to what extent the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is privy to the discussions that result in the shadow budget, but he assured my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security that the proposal was only for the future. Is it, or is it not? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman wish to intervene to tell me the answer? If so, I am anxious to give way to him. Surely the Labour party should know what its policy is

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: Diversionary tactics are no use. Is the proposal for the future, or is it not?

Silence speaks volumes; sometimes it speaks louder than words. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will not intervene, even with a lengthy, lawyer-like evasion. Labour will have to sort the matter out. It is clear that if Labour wishes to persist with the idea that £619 million will be saved, it will have to face the wrath of 4·3 million of its fellow citizens whose money will be taken back from them. If the removal of the rebate is not retrospective, however—if it is only for the future—the £619 million figure becomes £10 million, and knocks a hole in the heart of this so-called responsible document, the shadow budget. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way"] No. I am still dealing with the shadow budget. I shall be happy to give way later, but I have not yet finished discussing the anomalies in the document. For instance, it refers to closing the tax loophole available through offshore trusts. Labour implies that that would be worth £1 billion. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, we have closed that loophole. The Inland Revenue's estimate of the benefit to be gained from closing it is £100 million—

Mr. John Smith: That is the Government's estimate.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is recovering his composure and voice, says insouciantly that it is our estimate. It is not our estimate. It is the Inland Revenue's estimate—the same Inland Revenue as would have to advise him if he were Chancellor.

Our proposal will be more professionally drafted than the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal for closing the same loophole last year, and it is more far-reaching than his, yet it yields only one-tenth of the amount that the shadow budget says will be forthcoming. In one of his more memorable phrases, the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that the Government's plans were a con. The biggest con in this debate is the Labour party's shadow budget. Until we get answers—we certainly have not had any this afternoon—it will not just be Conservative Members who think that it is a con.

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall give way.

Mr. Ewing: Such generosity bewilders me, but I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. From his briefings, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House and the country what percentage of an average income is now paid in direct taxation—income tax and national health insurance—as opposed to when the Government took office? Is the Minister aware that many of my constituents would be over the moon to pay a higher rate of income tax if they could get a job to enable them to pay tax? The Prime Minister has done away with many jobs since coming to power.

Mr. Mellor: Direct taxes are down. If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about the average family—the man on a national average wage with a non-working wife—he must be aware that after five years of Labour government that man was one pound a week better off. After 12 years of Conservative Government he now has £58 more in his pocket. That is the reality. *[Interruption.]* I have answered the question. If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East answered questions so candidly, we should have got a bit further this afternoon.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend monitor the shadow Chancellor's broadcast tonight to make sure that he does not mislead viewers in the same way that he has misled us by using phoney figures in the shadow budget?

Mr. Mellor: Unless the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has already recorded the broadcast, he will have some time to rethink some of the points that have been made.

In the time that remains I shall return to the central proposition in the Budget. *[Interruption.]* I have answered the question of the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and in a way that discomfited him. I provided a statistic that the hon. Gentleman is unable to disprove. I said that the average working man is £58 a week better off after 12 years of Conservative government. I am prepared to answer that question 10 times every day because it does not embarrass me.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East properly spent time discussing the environment for business. The Chancellor predicted that inflation will fall to 4 per cent. by the end of the year and that will provide a great fillip to national self-confidence and morale. It is a clear sign we are on the right track. Obviously there is no painless or quick way to conquer inflation, but this time there will be sustained progress and the low figure will be maintained. The decision to join the ERM last October was a clear signal of our overriding commitment to stay the course and to stick to the task until inflation is decisively defeated. The prospect of sharply falling inflation provides the assurance that business needs that the recession will soon be behind us. The Budget provides more than reassurance for business; it provides action.

This is a good Budget for business.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): Will the Minister explain in his preamble on economic success how a contraction of 10 per cent. in fixed investment provides an effective springboard for that?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman realises that there has been an unprecedented expansion in business investment over the past decade—80 per cent. over eight years and nearly 50 per cent. in the three years from 1986 to 1989. Inevitably, from that very high plateau, there has been some falling off. This is a Budget for business, which increases companies' liquidity and will allow investment to rise again. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is no such thing as a straight line in these matters.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I want to push on a little more. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later. If I give way, I shall simply spend my whole time giving way and not making the points that will allow some of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members to intervene.

Our proposals look forward to the next decade. They build on the major reforms carried out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) who, in a reform of business taxation in 1984, cut corporation tax

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from 52 per cent. to 35 per cent. and removed accelerated investment allowances and gave tax relief at rates that more closely reflected commercial depreciation.

As I have already said, we were told that that was the end of capital investment as we knew it. It was, but in a way different from that assumed by the critics. There was an unprecedented increase in company investment not only in terms of money expended, but in terms of quality—investment that was not distorted by the availability of allowances and that made the investment seem good, whether or not it was profitable. Today, the entrepreneur makes his own decision on whether to invest and he reaps his reward—if he gets the decision right—by having a low taxation business economy. Those reforms have stood industry and commerce in good stead. They have been good for the entire nation.

Over 3 million jobs have been created since 1983 and we have become an attractive place to invest, not only for British entrepreneurs but for entrepreneurs from Japan and the United States. In recent years, the Americans have put two-thirds of their investment in the European Community into Britain and the Japanese have invested over 40 per cent.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I understand the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about investment being related to profitability. However, in the case of capital allowances, only 25 per cent. is allowed in the first year. To think that one can use a piece of equipment for one year and sell it for 75 per cent. of its worth is nonsense in many areas of capital equipment purchase. That 25 per cent. is probably eaten up by the commission for the seller. We are getting not a capital incentive but a disincentive. It is the removal of that which is important.

Mr. Mellor: It is a better rate than commercial depreciation. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the record of the past 10 years is that there has been an upsurge of investment. It is better to look at the outcome of policies than at academic points. *[Interruption.]* The facts speak for themselves. The level of business investment in Britain has never been higher. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) spoke about disincentives. When he held responsibility, the incentive was to invest, whether good or bad. That is not an improvement.

In the Budget we have seen major changes in corporation tax. The first change is to reduce corporation tax rate in two stages to 33 per cent., which means that once again we have the lowest company taxation rate in the developed world. It also looks after the smaller businesses. Over 4 million businesses do not pay the main rate of corporation tax. We have already done much to help them in times past but now, building further on the enterprise culture that has been created in the past decade, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has dramatically raised the profit limit for the lower rate of corporation tax. He has also pushed up the VAT registration threshold by no less than 40 per cent. to £35,000. He has cut down bureaucracy and tax forms and helped cash flow by delaying PAYE, national insurance contribution payments and so on.

What does all that mean in terms of improved cash flow to business this year? Some £380 million is to come from corporation tax, and that is only the 1990-91 retrospective cut, not the cut that is to come next year; £150 million is already due to come from bad debt relief, now there is a further £190 million on top, and £210 million is to come from later payments of PAYE and national insurance contributions. A further £25 million will come from the lifting of the VAT threshold, and a further £30 million from the reduction of the serious misdeclaration penalty. All that represents a transfer from the Exchequer to business of almost £1 billion, directly benefiting business across the spectrum. That is where companies will find extra resources to invest.

Mr. Beith: Welcome though the changes are, does the Chief Secretary accept that the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" reveals that £2·2 billion extra will be paid by business next year under the uniform business rate?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the uniform business rate removes the uncertainty that was created by the extraordinary changes in the business rates imposed by a number of local authorities. He also knows that business rate increases cannot be above the rate of inflation, whereas, during the past decade of local authority control of business rates, they increased by 40 per cent. over the rate of inflation. The hon. Gentleman does not make a good point if he suggests that we may have been wrong to change the system.

Given that this is a Budget for business, what matters is not what the Opposition say—they have an interest in deriding what is said and done—but what is said by the business community. Rarely has the business community greeted a Budget with such a chorus of approval. Sir Brian Corby, the president of the Confederation of British Industry—[HON. MEMBERS: "Scotland?"] He is the president of the CBI nationally, and we are one nation. Sir Brian Corby said:

> "This is almost precisely the Budget that the CBI recommended—a Budget for soundly based recovery, for saving and for investment. The prospect for further reductions in interest rates, a resumption of growth and low inflation are better tonight than they were this morning. The Chancellor has listened to those who create the nation's wealth."

The Chancellor has taken the action that the Institute of Directors asked for—on corporation tax, VAT, bad debt relief and the carry-back of losses. The relief to business will be a major help to those with cash flow problems. The IOD said of the Budget:

> "It addresses the immediate economic ills of business as part of an imaginative long term fitness campaign and the promotion of the individual in the market economy."

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Jeffrey Archer wrote that one.

Mr. Mellor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would find it helpful if he applied his mind to these matters a little more seriously.

The National Federation of Self Employed said:

> "This is a Budget to bring a smile to small businesses."

When did the organisation last say that about a Labour Budget?

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce said:

"He really listened to everything we had to say. Chambers are delighted at the practical measures of support to help businesses during a difficult time. This was a Budget for business we needed."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor deserves congratulations for eliciting such praise, which is not often given readily and which is given in genuine appreciation of his achievements.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Will the Chief Secretary explain why the Red Book shows such a remarkable increase in labour productivity in the coming 18 months coupled with such a remarkable fall in productive investment?

Mr. Mellor: We shall see. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, we will not."] The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) asked a serious question and I shall give him a serious answer. He knows very well that the expansion in business investment which has already been referred to—it has almost doubled over the past decade—will feed through into increases in productivity. That is the basis for that investment, which will not be distorted by bogus allowances. Such genuine investment will maximise production opportunities. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, although it may not be to his taste.

What does the Budget do for the supply side? One of the great strengths of the past decade has been the supply-side reforms to which the Government have paid so much attention. Our record speaks for itself. We took a machete to the jungle of banana-republic controls that existed under the Labour Government. Pay, price and dividend controls all went. Hire purchase controls were swept away and foreign exchange controls were abolished.

All those reforms liberated British industry and brought benefits that will last well beyond the end of the decade. Yesterday, we took a further major step forward in the supply side. My right hon. Friend gave profit-related pay a further important boost when he announced that, in future, the profit-related element would be entirely free from tax. That is particularly important when profits are under pressure and firms may be tempted to shed labour. Profit-related pay helps companies to contain labour costs without losing jobs, and provides the work force with incentives, which the Chancellor's proposals for share schemes will also do. We are not keeping share schemes in the boardroom. We have given incentives for them to spread to the shop floor. That is an example of the Conservative party's approach to industrial democracy which, in the long run, will prove far more efficacious than anything that the Opposition propose.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in areas such as south Derbyshire and Derby, where major engineering industries continue to do well and are optimistic about the future, employee share ownership schemes play a major part in ensuring that employees not only understand the way in which their businesses work but are committed to them, which enables businesses to do well?

Mr. Mellor: That is absolutely right. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced those measures.

We have heard a great deal from the Opposition about training. It is a good thing if there is a commitment to training on both sides of the House, but it is a bit rich for our record to be criticised given that our expenditure on training this year is £2·7 billion—two and a half times in real terms what the Labour Government were spending, even though unemployment more than doubled under Labour. Under the Labour Government, when did the unemployed have the opportunity of job clubs, employment training, the advice that is given at regular intervals and the job guarantee scheme?

We must also take into account the fact that some people wish to take responsibility for their own training needs. That is why we have recognised that we have a role in supporting employees who wish to help themselves, and the tax system should not stand in their way. That is why my right hon. Friend announced a new tax relief for people enterprising enough to get training for themselves. That was warmly welcomed by the training and enterprise councils and the business community and is a further major contribution to supply side reform.

Let me say something about the changes to the community charge. In recent weeks, there has been much talk about fair taxes—particularly in relation to the community charge and the level of local taxation. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor tackled both issues head on. The package that he announced yesterday brought the community charge throughout the country down to what the Government regard as a fair and tolerable level. Indeed, in some of the best-run councils in the country there will now be no charge to pay at all.

Opposition Members have already started to say that the proposal for an across-the-board reduction in the community charge by £140 is not fair. The switch to VAT is fair, sensible and fully in line with the Government's wider tax objectives. VAT is a pay-as-you-buy tax. The more you buy, the more you pay. The essentials of life —food, housing, domestic fuel, power and even public transport—are all zero rated, so these goods bear none of the burden of reducing the community charge. For lower income groups, zero-rated expenditures account for a higher proportion of total spending than they do for the better-off. As a result, VAT accounts for a larger proportion of household expenditure the higher the income of the household.

Opposition Members are, as usual, facing all ways at once. On the one hand, they want higher investment and higher savings; on the other, they seem to be opposed to switching from a tax on income to a tax on spending. On the one hand, they shout from the steeples that the community charge hits the poor; on the other hand, when we reduce the community charge they tell us that too, hits the poor. [HON. MEMBERS: "Abolish it."] Are the Opposition proposing to abolish local government and local government services? Labour councils have contributed to the overspending that has led to unacceptably high community charges. Perhaps only Scotsmen on the Conservative Benches believe that "You canna spend what you have nae got." If a Labour Government—if there ever is one—wants to sustain Labour councils, they would have to find a way to resource their extravagances. By reducing the community charge, we have proved that there is no free lunch. If the reduction has to be made through local taxes, the only honourable and principled thing to do is to impose them on national taxes while continuing to press local authorities to improve efficiency.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): One of the principles that we understood was very important to the

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Conservatives was accountability. If the people of Wandsworth are to be subsidised by the people of Teesside and pay no community charge, how can the council be held accountable by the local community? If the charge is £1 in the Orkneys, how can that council be held accountable by the local community?

Mr. Mellor: The council is reaping the benefit of being efficient. Wandsworth has the second lowest amount of Government assistance of the inner-London boroughs. It receives a much smaller amount of money per head from the Government than Lambeth, but the community charge in Lambeth will be £450 due to the feckless irresponsibility of Lambeth council. Far from accountability being abolished, it is just as sharp. Throughout the country it will be possible to draw differences between sensibly run councils and foolishly run councils, and the communities will be able to make choices.

Over the past few weeks there has been a great deal of speculation that this would be a small or insipid Budget. No doubt the commentators are feeling a little foolish about those predictions today. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has introduced a Budget that manages to be both prudent and imaginative. It reinforces the Government's central aim of defeating inflation and it contains a number of important measures to help business through the recession. It also contains particular help for small businesses.

The Budget helps families. More than that, it helps all community charge payers and it continues the Government's policy of making the tax and national insurance system fairer. Above all, the Budget tackles the big issues. This is not the Budget of an indecisive Government. It is the Budget of a confident Government who are ready, willing and able to go on and on.

5.42 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): We are debating today the Chancellor of the Exchequer's first Budget, the production of which is by common consent an awesome task. We welcome the VAT assistance to small businesses and the concessions on corporation tax. We also welcome the commitment on mortgage relief which is to remain at £30,000, but only on the basic rate. The Chancellor is also trying to organise additional support for sport and the arts through the pools promoters. However, those proposals can be summed up as small beer.

The Prime Minister also introduced only one Budget, and it is reasonable and fair to say that, since then, the British economy has gone from bad to worse. The country is now in severe recession. When preparing his Budget, the Chancellor saw the imminence of a general election. He knows that that major political event is drawing even closer and he considered the warring factions in the Conservative party, particularly in respect of the nightmare of the poll tax.

The Daily Telegraph, that organ of Conservative thought and opinion, on 14 March described the poll tax as

"the biggest self-inflicted political wound of modern times."

The poll tax was the personal crusade of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). It was the flagship policy of her Government. However, it is clear that the ship has run aground.

I appreciate that any Chancellor of the Exchequer must be concerned about income and expenditure. I understand that the poll tax will cost £500 million to collect in 1991-92. The cost of collecting rates would have been a fleabite in comparison.

The Chancellor must have used his blinkers in reading the Audit Commission's report that was issued a few days ago. The report reveals that more than 7·5 million summonses will have to be issued. It states that courts will need a significant injection of resources if they are to cut the backlog of cases. Most councils have had to resort to borrowing to bridge the gap between current expenditure and what they hope eventually to collect. The Audit Commission's report tells a story of delays, backlogs, bad debts and underpayments, all coupled with a colossal administrative work load.

I did not exaggerate when I described the poll tax as a nightmare. The Chancellor seems to have reached the same conclusion. Yesterday, he announced one of the biggest turnarounds in modern political history: the switch of £4·25 billion expenditure from local to central Government, with the leeway made up by a 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT.

The Labour party has long recognised that there is too much financial pressure on local government, but the Government's move is essentially a panic measure in an attempt to save the Conservative party's skin at the forthcoming general election. The Government have discovered that the poll tax is impossible to collect while VAT amounts to cash on delivery. Apparently there is to be a further chapter in this remarkable episode—or what I describe as a skin-saving exercise—when the Secretary of State for the Environment makes his statement tomorrow. There has been speculation—as well as suggested leaks—about the Government reducing local government to one tier and transferring certain services to direct central Government control.

I have always had considerable regard for British local government. Before I became a Member of this House, I served on a major local authority. I appreciate that there have been a few rogue elephants in recent years, but over the years local government has served Britain well and is very much a part of our democratic tradition. I have never been convinced that the man in Whitehall necessarily knows best. I warn the Government that restructuring local government and also reorganising its revenue-raising powers is a pretty tall order. Administrative costs could be substantial, and chaos could be caused. Last Thursday, the latest unemployment figures showed that no fewer than 2 million people are out of work. The total is rising by about 80,000 a month. On present trends, the jobless total could top 3 million in a year. This year, no fewer than 20,000 businesses will go to the wall. Business investment will fall by 16 per cent. when the rest of Europe gears up for the 1992 single market. Last year, 44,000 homes were repossessed by building societies and banks—that is easily a record—and mortgage arrears are now at record levels.

I am particularly concerned about the situation in Wales. Unemployment is again at more than 100,000. For males, the figure is 10·3 per cent. Of course, that is without any allowance for the doctoring of statistics in which the Government have engaged in recent years. Listening to the Secretary of State for Wales during Welsh questions on Monday one would have thought that he was achieving the mother of victories. Perhaps he has been taking lessons from Saddam Hussein. Sadly, one third of unemployed

people in Wales have been out of work for more than 12 months. Approximately one third are under 25. What a waste of a priceless asset—our young people. Much of our unemployment is directly due to the rundown of British manufacturing industry.

I recall the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), when he was Chancellor, saying that manufacturing industry was no longer important. Earlier this month, the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee produced a report entitled "Innovation in Manufacturing Industry", which made the serious accusation that, in the 1980s, there was virtually no net investment in British manufacturing industry. What an indictment of the vintage Thatcher years. The present Chancellor, when he was in the lower echelons of Government, used to talk about the British miracle, and he repeated that theme yesterday. He compares our achievement with those of Germany. Some British miracle; some comparison.

The House of Lords Select Committee also found that the United Kingdom was the only country in which gross domestic expenditure on research and development declined as a percentage of gross domestic product over 1981-88. That decline was largely the result of the reduction in Government support for research and development. That has happened despite the oil wealth and the privatisation proceeds that were poured into the Treasury coffers. It is no wonder that British economic output per head is now lower than it was two and a half years ago. That decline, that mismanagement, can no longer be accounted for in terms of idle employees or obstructive trade unions. The heart of the problem is the Government's managerial incompetence.

The weakest, such as pensioners, are losing. If state pensions were uprated in line with earnings, a single pensioner would be £11·75 a week better off, and a married couple would gain £18·95. Of course, there was no mention in the Budget about any increase for pensioners. I am glad that the Government have rediscovered the virtues of child benefit. It is a welcome move, for it gives most help to low-income families, who account for three quarters of those receiving child benefit.

The Chancellor seems to be relying on a reduction in interest rates to get him out of his difficulties. I agree that interest rates are a major economic indicator, but for two and a half years they have languished at around 15 per cent. As a result, we have suffered a damaging dose of monetary overkill, which was inflicted on the country by a Government who, even after 12 years in office, lack self-confidence and credibility.

Of course we welcome the recent decreases in interest rates, because lower interest rates are vital to restore industrial confidence, to ease family budgets, and to get the country out of the recession in which the Government have put it. Of course inflation will come down. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said, that is the inevitable consequence of recession.

However, the real problem is the weakness of our industrial capacity and competitiveness. We need to invest in our manufacturing industry. A Labour Chancellor would help to reverse the decline. We need a new programme of expenditure on training, not cuts of £245 million, as was announced recently. Likewise, we need a temporary employment scheme to assist the unemployed. I have often said that unemployment is like a tap that is left running—sheer waste.

I conclude on the point with which I began. This is the Chancellor's first Budget. The nation faces enormous problems, but the Budget will do nothing to solve them. The measures that he has introduced are essentially panic-stricken, in an effort to save the Tory party at the polls. The Chancellor will not succeed, because people will eventually realise that the major problems of the economy remain as vivid as ever. We have a massive trade deficit. How much longer can we finance it? We have 2 million unemployed, and the number is fast increasing. Also, there is a continuous decline in manufacturing industry. A change of Government is urgently needed. A Labour Chancellor will introduce the necessary measures once again to put Britain back on the road to recovery.

5.57 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I begin by declaring my interests, which are all listed in the Register of Members' Interests, as some of them may be thought at least partly to inform some of my remarks, although I dare say that some of my comments are blindingly obvious.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on an excellently presented Budget. If it was a beginner's Budget, I hope that he will have opportunities to present many more. He hoped that his Budget would be known as a Budget for business. It probably is a Budget for business, but he will have some difficulty in getting that title to stick, at least in the early days, because of its dramatic impact on local government finance.

I make no bones about welcoming my right hon. Friend's direct approach to local government finance. I agree that it has become unsatisfactory that the share of the cost of local government services has shifted more towards the local taxpayer, and away from taxpayers at a national level. The correction that he has made is a good one.

However, it will always be difficult to convince people about the way in which local government services should be financed. There is no doubt in my mind about the unpopularity of the community charge. I have had plenty of letters on that score, but interleaved with them have been many other letters saying that more should be spent on local government services. People constantly ask for improvements. Indeed, both those points have sometimes been made in the same long letter of complaint about the community charge. Some letters have started with a complaint about paying the community charge, but ended with the demand that more money should be spent.

People must realise that there is no magic cure to this problem. Somehow or other, the costs of the services must be financed. We have a choice between tying the payment to property, which does not move, or to people, who do move—and, my word, how people move. Apparently, my own electorate has shrunk by 3,000 in the past year. I do not believe that that is because of any decay in my area. People have disappeared. That highlights one difficulty about taxing people rather than property.

If one wants to tax people effectively, one must do so either through their income or through their spending. I do not believe that we should be looking for ways of increasing direct taxation—so that leaves only indirect taxation. In the circumstances, the system that my right hon. Friend has chosen, which is to put extra on VAT, is perfectly reasonable, because those who spend more will

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pay more and those whose incomes are spent largely on the essentials of life will not make a particularly heavy contribution.

It is difficult for the Opposition to seek to stigmatise VAT as regressive while continuing to embrace the idea of domestic rates, because nothing in domestic rates made that form of taxation essentially progressive. What my right hon. Friend has done is therefore absolutely right, because we shall now have a more sensible balance and distribution of costs between national and local taxpayers.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor probably hoped that people would regard his Budget as a green Budget. Conclusions on that point may be somewhat qualified: the Budget has green tinges, but obviously not enough for some people. We need to face the fact that my right hon. Friend's attempt to include environmental considerations in his Budget will undoubtedly hit certain people very hard. The increase in excise duty on petrol and the increase in the taxation on company cars will not be welcomed by a great many people. There will not be any singing and dancing in the streets by the people who will be affected by those taxation changes.

Even so, what my right hon. Friend has done is evidently not enough for the thoroughly green parties in this country. Writing in today's edition of *The Independent*, Julie Hill of the Green Alliance states that the 15 per cent. increase on excise duty on petrol

"is unlikely to have a significant effect."

I hope that, when people at the pumps are paying an extra 16p, 17p or 18p per gallon, they will remember that the Green Alliance thinks that that is not nearly enough of an increase.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been sensible to deal with such matters progressively and in not deciding simply to make a gigantic switch that would grab the headlines. If he had done so, he might have received plaudits from the Green Alliance, but he would not have received many from the people outside. People are not ready for such a comprehensive switch in taxation.

Julie Hill of the Green Alliance also stated:

"company cars are still unjustifiably subsidised".

That may be so, but in taking a further step in taxing that benefit my right hon. Friend has adopted the right approach. Those who would plead for more to be done more quickly on that issue are forgetting that such moves would have a serious effect on the car industry, which is going through a difficult time, and that such a policy would also be difficult for those who earn their living in the manufacture of motor cars.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor took another step towards the environmental lobby by increasing the duty on tobacco by more than the rate of inflation. I very much welcome that, but I am afraid that I would go further. Although I speak with the prejudice of a non-smoker, I believe that it is nonsense that we continue to include tobacco in the retail prices index. I hope that the House can reach a general agreement that the Government should re-examine the RPI and remove tobacco from it. Logically, I must add that alcohol should be similarly considered—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because tobacco and alcohol are the bolt-on extras to the cost of living. They are by no means essential, and I do not see why the RPI should be bolstered by products that the Government believe harm health—and that are proven to harm health. As we are urging people to curb their consumption of such products, I do not see why they should be allowed to boost the RPI and, as a result, to boost spending.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor could have gone a little further with provisions affecting motoring without embracing the vengeful approach of the green parties. If we are to keep vehicle excise duty, I do not see any justification for freezing it at its present level for all motor cars. It would be sensible to adjust it according to the size of the car. If we are not to use VED in that way, we might as well forget about it.

I know that the former Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), has argued that adjusting vehicle excise duty by, say, £10 or £20 would have only a small effect on people's choice of car when they are contemplating expenditure of several thousand pounds. But who is thinking of £10 or £20? I am thinking of something much more dramatic. A 1,000 cc car may well attract vehicle excise duty of £100, but why should not a 2·5 or 2·9 litre car bear a vehicle excise duty of £300 or £400? That would influence people's choice of motor car and drive them towards smaller and more fuel-efficient cars. That idea deserves greater consideration.

The gap between unleaded and leaded petrol should be widened. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor widened that gap somewhat in his statement yesterday, but it already seems to be being interpreted as a differential of only 2p in the price at the pumps, despite what my right hon. Friend said about 3p per litre on unleaded petrol and 4p per litre on leaded. Cannot that gap be widened without cost to the Exchequer?

I wish to make a similar point about catalytic converters, in which I have a particular interest. By law, they will be necessary on all new cars from 1 January 1993, but a boost could have been given to their early purchase now, either through VED or through the car tax. Again, that would have helped the car industry at a difficult time, and might have persuaded a few more people that it would be worth buying a new car now rather than putting it off for a few more months. On balance, therefore, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made some sensible decisions on environmental measures.

However, I come back to the question whether it was a Budget for business. I believe that it was. My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on putting the emphasis on corporate rather than personal taxation. The real test is whether the Budget will get us out of the recession. That judgment may depend on how quickly and by how much interest rates come down. Understanding the exact characteristics of a recession is not easy. They can sometimes be long and shallow, or short and shallow, or short and deep. This time people have been laid off, but not many factories have closed. There has been a great deal of investment over the last three years, the effects of which have to come through. I believe that the pick-up may be swift.

Manufacturing industry feels neglected and unwanted. I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) and for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) that we must give more emphasis to manufacturing industry. People in manufacturing are a little like teachers: they do not think that the Government compliment them enough. The fact

that some good words are said about them does not seem to affect them. They notice only the occasional critical comments.

Manufacturing is important. The only way that the country will survive is by our success in making and selling things. The sooner the Government make it clear to the industrial sector that they think the same, the better. We must revive confidence. Confidence will depend on low inflation. The Budget is headed determinedly in that direction. Confidence will also come from oil price stability, which fortunately we seem to have. It will come too from exchange rate certainty, which is also implicit in the Budget.

I believe that the Chancellor's mixture is right to achieve the cure that industry as a whole and manufacturing industry in particular need. We can look forward with confidence to a substantial and sustained economic recovery over the next few months.

6.10 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Budget and most public discussion of it has been dominated by the poll tax: £10 billion later, we still have the poll tax, extra VAT, the prospect of a new property tax tomorrow and water rates which are rising to levels above those of the old rates. Of course, water rates still operate on the rating system. One curiosity tomorrow will be to find out what will happen to water rates now that property taxes seem to be back in the Government's favour.

In order to proceed with the changes, parliamentary procedure will be drastically truncated, with no proper debate on the Bill which will be necessary to implement the shift in local finance. I remind the House that, when measures are not properly debated and amendments are not properly considered, great mistakes are made and magnified. That happened with the poll tax originally and will be even more evident if there is no proper debate on the details of the new Bill.

The result will be no adequate tax base for local government, with local government finance divided over several taxes, and a weakened local government system, with more power taken to the centre. That could all have been avoided if the Government had gone for a local tax in the first place.

In any other walk of life, people rarely have opportunities to make mistakes on the scale of the poll tax mistake. If they make colossal mistakes, they are apt to lose their jobs. I can think of no better case for people losing their jobs than the scale of the errors made on the poll tax. So the first problem that the Government addressed in the Budget was the poll tax mess that they themselves had created. The second was the economic mess——

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of the poll tax, will he say whether he is in favour of reducing it by £140 per head? Does he intend to vote accordingly?

Mr. Beith: I shall certainly not oppose the reliefs which are to be given to poll tax payers. The poll tax is incapable of bearing the levels of charge being put on it. It is an unfair system of tax, and relief should be applied. It would have been much better not to have it at all but to have a fair local income tax, which would not have needed to be baled out.

The second problem which the Government had to address in the Budget was the economic mess which they created, with a recession, rising unemployment, high interest rates and high inflation. That meant that the Chancellor had to convince the markets that he would be fiscally responsible and firmly committed to maintaining sterling's position in the exchange rate mechanism.

That is all well and good, and the Chancellor has made a reasonable attempt in the Budget to demonstrate that fiscal responsibility and that commitment. But they could have been achieved more clearly and over a longer period by announcing the measure that we proposed, of greater independence for the central bank on monetary policy. That would have removed the need for the premium on interest rates which arises from uncertainty about the Government's attitude to monetary policy and the level of sterling. That would have allowed us to loosen fiscal policy slightly to counteract the deepening recession.

The fiscal responsibility which the Chancellor had to assume was forced upon him by the Government's own mistakes. The creation of the recession has led to the automatic stabilisers and to the return to deficit. That, together with the need to bale out the poll tax, conditioned the Chancellor's whole approach in his Budget.

There was an interesting phrase about the exchange rate mechanism in the Chancellor's speech:

> "The time has come to apply ourselves wholeheartedly to the task of making our membership a success."

I take that to mean that, up to that moment, the Government had not applied themselves wholeheartedly to the task of making a success of our membership of the exchange rate mechanism and that what the Chancellor said signifies a new approach. He followed that up by saying that at the moment he had no plans to move to a narrower band. I can only take that to be a signal that that is under more active consideration than before. I hope that that is what is intended.

Another interesting phrase appears on page 9 of the Red Book:

> "Interest rate convergence will follow inflation convergence. Both are likely to take some time to achieve."

However, that contrasts with what the Chancellor said yesterday:

> "The prospect, therefore, is that we will narrow the inflation gap with Europe remarkably quickly."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, cols. 165, 167.]

The Chancellor was saying in one breath that it will happen quickly, and in another that it will take some time to achieve. Only one of those statements can be true, unless they apply to totally different measures of inflation. Perhaps that can be clarified.

What the Chancellor said yesterday on inflation needs most of all to be qualified. He referred constantly to the forecast of 4 per cent. for headline inflation. It is not long since he as Chief Secretary, and his two predecessors as Chancellor, were lecturing us about how misleading the headline inflation figure is, and how vital it is to look at the underlying rate of inflation. I listened to all those lectures and was greatly moved by them. Perhaps I was influenced by their strictures to look more closely at the treatment of inflation.

I find that the GDP deflators set out in the Red Book show none of the wonderful improvements. They show that we will continue to have a high rate of underlying inflation. Even if we take account of the effect of that on

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the introduction of the 2·5 per cent. extra VAT, it will still show a failure to converge with lower inflation rates in other parts of the European Community.

If we take some of the other indices, such as producer output price inflation, which is quite a good index of underlying inflation, we find much wishful thinking in the Red Book. Indeed, we find the statement:

"This recent pick up in inflation is surprising."

Surely, after all these years, the Government are no longer surprised by the persistence of British inflation. It is worrying that they seem to grasp at the straw of 4 per cent. headline inflation and do not recognise the 7 per cent. underlying inflation rate which all their forecasts contain.

Figures that have been put before us in the debate and in the documents tell the story. Output is down by 5 per cent. and fixed investment is falling by 9·75 per cent. Those are alarming figures, particularly when set alongside the unemployment forecasts and the serious unemployment that we face.

The Government seem to think that, despite all that, productivity will rebound with the recovery in activity and that that will keep down unit labour costs. If the recovery is as slow as the Government forecast, how will productivity rebound? I suppose the Government would argue that it will do so because business will have a better climate as a result of the Budget measures.

How good is the Budget for business? Many of the tax changes, large and small, are welcome. Indeed, they follow closely the submissions which we made in the Liberal Democrat alternative budget, including the proposals for raising the VAT threshold, changing the VAT bad debt scheme and changing the VAT serious misdeclaration penalty scheme. The measures on corporation tax are welcome in principle but they are less effective in serving the purposes that I favour than the measures that we propose. The Government's measures will not stimulate investment.

I do not share the Labour party's view that it is possible to distinguish between manufacturing investment and other types of commercial investment. That understates the value of the services sector and the general tradeability of services. However, measures designed to encourage investment in general, such as indexation of depreciation allowances, might have been a better stimulus to industry than the proposed changes in corporation tax.

As I said to the Chief Secretary, when one adds up all the changes—the Government's estimate is that there are almost £1 billion-worth of tax reductions for industry, which it will take at face value—one must set that against the extra £2·2 billion that business will pay in uniform business rates in the coming year. That is an absolutely massive increase in liability for businesses both large and small. It will be felt particularly keenly by small businesses.

The fundamental problems for United Kingdom industry remain, against the background of the inadequacies of our education system and transport system. People have practical problems in simply getting to work by public transport, especially in London. There was no new investment in education or transport.

The tax relief for training does not address any of the serious problems that we face. It does not even begin until next year. It will help only a limited range of qualifications, and it will not add up to a tenth of what the Government have cut from the real training budget during the current year. Investment in training, transport and education would all have been sensible measures to take at this stage, which would have justified some loosening of fiscal policy.

I welcome some of the measures in the Budget, including the tax easement for people who were hostages and prisoners in the early stages of the Gulf conflict and lost the benefit of the tax relief which they could have expected to receive for the year. I have pressed Ministers on that several times during parliamentary questions, and I am glad that the Chancellor has now conceded the point. It will give deserved relief to people who have gone through a terrible experience.

I also welcome the removal of top-rate mortgage interest relief. Again, we have pressed that measure on the Government for several years. We also welcome indexation of excise duties, closing the capital gains tax loophole, the Chancellor's increases in petrol duty and his rather incomplete measures on company cars. Those are all measures that we pressed on the Chancellor. However, in the case of company cars, he has been careful to ensure that only the employer's contribution will be affected, and not that of the employee.

Mr. Harry Ewing: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to his point about tax relief for people who were connected with Kuwait? Has not he misunderstood the Budget proposal? Will it not benefit people who were in Britain at the time of the outbreak of hostilities who could not return to Kuwait? The mere fact that they could not return meant that they were in Britain for more than 12 weeks and therefore did not qualify for exemption from tax. As they were here for more than 12 weeks, they were liable to pay tax. The Chancellor announced yesterday that the Government are waiving that liability to tax. It has nothing to do with those who were held hostage.

Mr. Beith: I do not know whether the category that the hon. Gentleman describes is included in the relief. I assumed from what the Chancellor said that he intended to benefit the people whose eligibility for tax relief was lost because they returned from the Gulf before the end of the tax year when they were released from being held hostage. The matter is a Finance Bill Committee point. We can consider it in detail in Committee. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will serve on that Committee. He can raise the point then.

I was listing some tax-raising measures which the Government were right to take. However, the trouble with the Government taking such measures—which we ourselves proposed—is that the compensating benefits have not been provided. The Government have raided tax-raising measures without spending the revenue where it should have been spent. They have increased the tax penalty on the use of a private motor car, but where is the improvement in public transport to enable people not to use their cars for essential journeys and journeys into city centres? Where is the improvement in rural public transport to compensate people in rural areas for the high cost of petrol when they have seen such a staggering decline in rural transport since bus deregulation? Investment in public transport should have been undertaken and paid for out of the gains in revenue. The purpose of taxes which are directed at the environment is not merely to raise revenue but to change the way in which we treat the environment.

There are several items missing from the Budget. Several measures that people expected were not taken. There is a large gap when it comes to green measures. I have already referred to measures on the motor car, but where were the measures referred to by the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on catalytic converters? Where were the pollution taxes hinted at in the Government's environment White Paper? When pressed on such taxes, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who now chairs the Conservative party and was previously Secretary of State for the Environment, said that the Chancellor would be considering them. It seems that he is still considering them, because they were not in the Budget this year.

Another trumpeted possibility that we pressed on the Government last year was wider tax relief for child care. That has not appeared in the Budget this year. Things have gone very quiet on that front, at a time when the Government were widely expected to give greater opportunities for women who want to do so to work, even where workplace nurseries are not available. Indeed, that facility is available to very few people.

The effect on charities of the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT strengthens the case for more extensive relief for charities. Charities will face serious problems after the Budget.

This was a Budget to get the Government out of a mess of their own making, not to deal with the present and future problems of the United Kingdom economy. The measures in the Budget were the result of the rejection of the poll tax by the electors of Ribble Valley, of the inflation and the recession—which resulted from the credit boom that the Government stimulated—the failure to control inflation and of the failure to keep child benefit up to date. The Budget was a clean-up operation for the Government's failures. It is not sufficient to guide us safely out of recession.

6.25 pm

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made several cogent points to which I shall return later. First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a thoroughly civilised as well as an astute Budget. My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) and my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and I and other hon. Members have vehemently opposed the Government's freezing of child benefit for several years past. So my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's assurance yesterday that those bad old days were over and that in future child benefit would be uprated with inflation was enormously welcome.

The increase in child benefit is equally welcome, although I am puzzled by the form that it took. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced that he would not uprate in general but only for the eldest child, I pointed out that the only countries which gave more in child benefit or child allowances for the first child were Iran and Malta. I am puzzled as to what close affinities the Government find between Iran and Malta and our social system and customs. Such affinities do not immediately spring to mind. One would have thought that we had closer affinities with countries on the European continent, some of which differentiate between children but give more to the third child. That has slightly more rationale because it is well known that the worst poverty is in families with large numbers of children. However, on the whole it is better to keep the rate uniform. Whether the change is illogical or not, what has been done is enormously welcome and the Chancellor's assurance is greatly valued.

I also welcome the Government's tolerance of running deficits and their intention to have a public sector borrowing requirement this year and next year. However, it may be rather larger than is predicted in the Red Book. Nevertheless, the firm realisation that Budgets can be balanced at best only over the medium term, leaving open how medium the term is and how long it will go on, seems an excellent idea.

Like the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I welcome what is being done by way of corporation tax and for small businesses. Having forgotten that there was a heavy extra burden on the uniform business rate, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I welcome very much the fact that a great deal is being done, even if in a minor way, for businesses. I welcome also the uprating of tax on tobacco, alcohol and petrol. It seems to me that, in a possible—perhaps probable—election year, that is a thoroughly responsible thing to do. I regret very much the fact that the lottery that we had been rather led to expect will not be introduced. Help for the arts, sport and other good causes would have been very welcome.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Football pools are now getting into the arts and sport on a very large scale and they are nothing but a lottery.

Sir Ian Gilmour: Football pools are indeed a lottery. I welcome also what is being done by the sports and arts trusts. However, as I understand it, the scale of benefit is very much smaller than would be provided by a national lottery. Although I welcome what is being done, I regret the fact that a national lottery will not be set up. I hope that that will be remedied next year.

Having been a heavy opponent of the poll tax from the word go, I welcome very much the fact that such a hefty chunk is being taken out of it. Of course, until we see what happens tomorrow, there is not much point in saying anything more about that. I am not wholly sure, however, that the Chancellor is wise to finance the reduction out of VAT. As other hon. Members have said, the headline rate of inflation will be improved, but the core rate will increase, and consumer spending, on which the Government greatly rely to get the country out of recession, may take a knock.

I come now to my main point. While fully recognising the great merits of the Chancellor's individual proposals, I am concerned about the strategic plan that must be presumed to underlie them. We have to consider where the economy is headed—not just in the short term, but for the next few years. The Chancellor, in his Budget speech, said that he expected output to grow by 2 per cent. during the year up to the end of the first half of next year, and that this should be followed by annual growth of more or less 3 per cent. That does not sound too bad; indeed, it sounds pretty good. However, it is worse than it appears. The forecast growth rate is little better than the long-run trend. Starting where we are now, there is no prospect, on the basis of the Chancellor's own showing, of any decline in

[Sir Ian Gilmour]

unemployment. The very sorry prospect is of unemployment hovering indefinitely around 2 million or 2·5 million. But will things be even as good as that?

It has now been accepted by the Treasury that a severe recession is under way. The Treasury, with characteristic honesty, has produced, in its Red Book, a table showing how last year's forecast of 1 per cent. growth in GDP in 1990 turned out to be a growth of only 0·5 per cent. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that this was a Government and Treasury technique to make things seem much better than they really were. He suggested that it was all rather dishonest. I only wish that it were a technique, but I acquit the Government and the Treasury of any such design. I am sure that they actually believed the forecast—and that is more worrying. I think that the Treasury has been wholly honest, but I wish that it had carried its honesty even further and emphasised the full scale of the revision that it has had to make. That can be done only by taking a slightly longer period than 1989-90.

In last year's Red Book, the Treasury forecast that, between 1988 and the first half of 1991, GDP would rise by 4·75 per cent., with manufacturing output rising by 5·5 per cent. The comparable figures for that period of two and a half years are now zero growth for GDP and minus 1·25 per cent. in the case of manufacturing output. These downward revisions mean that the level of GDP is now nearly 5 per cent. lower than was expected only a year ago, while in the case of manufacturing output there is a drop of nearly 7 per cent. That is a staggering discrepancy.

I am not making an abstruse, technical or academic point. When we, as laymen, give our support to the Chancellor for his Budget proposals, we are completely dependent on the accompanying economic forecast being approximately—if only very approximately—correct. The Chancellor himself must agree that his Budget proposals can be justified only if they are followed by events that bear some slight resemblance to what was forecast. There must be some point at which it would have to be conceded that events had taken a turn so different from what had been expected that the entire rationale of existing policies was destroyed.

We are not all that far from such a situation—certainly not as far as I would wish. Professor Wynne Godley, whose forecasting track record is probably second to none, forecasts in the *New Statesman* not a rise in output from now on, but a continued decline through 1992. Unfortunately, the Budget papers contain nothing that wholly convinces me that Professor Godley is wrong. Indeed, all that we need is a repeat performance from the Treasury forecasters to make his forecast come true. Another error of the same size as that of last year would mean that, after the drop of 2 per cent. in output in 1991, there would be not the expected rise of 2 per cent. in 1992, but a further fall of 3 per cent.—and unemployment would be rising towards 4 million rather than 3 million.

I hope that before the end of the debate Treasury Ministers will make good what is at present an unacceptable gap in the material that we have been offered. In other words, I should like to be told why things have turned out to be so much worse than was expected, so that we may have more confidence that, next time round, Treasury forecasts will prove to be right. The weakest part of the Red Book is the short section devoted to recovery. I profoundly hope that the Treasury forecasts are correct at last and that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor can look forward to framing a number of successful and socially aware Budgets.

6.37 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The backdrop to the Budget is a recession that is very deep indeed—precisely as the Opposition forecast. Indeed, last October, the Treasury Select Committee found that the economic indicators showed a profile of decline in economic activity in this country much the same as in the year 1980-81. Over the last year or so, Chancellors have said that this recession was not a recession; then that it would be shallow and short; then that it was deeper, but was only a ripple from the world trade cycle—as if it were something from the act of God department. In fact, it is a deep and dangerous, home-grown slump.

The fall in GDP this year is no less than 2 per cent., whereas the Treasury, in the autumn statement four months ago, forecast a rise of 0·5 per cent. This is a phenomenal level of error over a mere four months. These Treasury sources, whose forecasting record, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham said, is spectacularly worse than that of other bodies, let alone the Treasury Select Committee, now foresee a most tremendous turnround, taking us to a growth rate of 2 per cent. from this mid-summer to next mid-summer.

It would be interesting to know what the source of this turnround might be. I suppose that it could be restocking, or the end of destocking, by industry; but restocking is not what it used to be. As industry has become more efficient, it needs less in the inventory and in work in progress for a given level of output. Or there could be a spectacular rise in exports, but that does not seem to be forecast in the Red Book. After 25 years of reading Red Books, I have come to the conclusion that Treasury economic forecasts are a form of institutionalised leg pulling. The results never bear out the optimistic scenarios. As a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service off and on since the mid-1970s, I believe that the Committee needs alternative forecasting machinery of its own so that it can serve the House with more objective calculations. The Committee is well served by its advisers but it needs an analytical staff to provide an alternative view to the nonsense with which we have been presented by the Treasury on the public sector borrowing requirement, trade, employment, inflation and monetary volumes, at least over the past few years.

It is clear that, in this recession, the economy will decline by the greatest amount in one year since 1980. We are seeing a stream of business failures, the collapse of corporate profits and dividends, and rapidly rising unemployment. As the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham said, it is difficult to believe the Government's figures for the PSBR in the coming financial year at a time of such deep recession. It seems that the £8 billion that appears in the Red Book will be £10 billion or £12 billion, and that it will be a greater sum in the following year.

It is clear that, unless the Government fiddle the unemployment figures for the 30th time in a decade, unemployment will reach, and probably exceed, 2·5 million this year. All that is coupled with a cut in training

places. We should spend on training during a recession so that we have a skilled work force ready for the upturn. My constituents are being turned away from training courses because resources for training are being cut. In Norwich, scarcely a week goes by without redundancies in the food, footwear, engineering and construction industries. The retailing and construction industries in East Anglia have come to a full stop. They are important engines of growth and economic development in such a region. The increase in value added tax will hit both industries.

Consumer spending in 1991 was forecast in the autumn statement—we are back to Treasury forecasts again—to increase by 1·75 per cent. Instead, it will fall by 1·75 per cent. Imagine the impact that that will have on the retail trade. Manufacturing output will fall be 5 per cent. in 1991, which will take it to roughly where it was in 1979. So much for the decade of the enterprise economy.

It is said that this is a Budget for business, but that does not bear too close an examination. We are told in the Red Book that corporation tax will be reduced by about £1 billion, but company national insurance contributions will rise by over £600 million. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, paragraph 1.2 on page 7 of the Red Book tells us that rates—mostly the uniform business rate—will rise by £2·2 billion in one year. When challenged on that, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that at least the UBR gave us continuity. I do not know what sort of continuity it is when we read that there will be an increase of £2·2 billion in rates as a result of the impost on businesses.

Part of the miraculous upturn in mid-1991 derives from an even more miraculous improvement in unit labour costs at the same time. Chart 3.11, which appears on page 30 of the Red Book, shows British labour costs falling from an annual increase of 10 per cent. in early 1990 to 3 per cent. or 4 per cent. in mid-1992. The graph is unbelievable. It seems that our relative labour costs rise, only to fall off a cliff, as it were, in 1991. At that stage they join—surprise, surprise—or converge with the rate of change in unit labour costs in the 16 major industrial countries.

After we have experienced greater wage inflation than other countries, there is suddenly to be an improvement within a few months. In other words, there will be a huge increase in labour productivity that will be associated with a vast decline in investment. The Financial Secretary's answer to my intervention on that issue seemed to be merely a smokescreen. The effect of past "investment" cannot produce that level of productivity increase, given that companies have been disinvesting on a large scale. The Government's assertions strain belief.

I welcome the green tinges in the Budget, including the price that will be charged for unleaded petrol and the provisions that bear on company cars, but the effect on energy efficiency will be perverse. The increase in the rate of VAT will lead to an increase in the cost of making home improvements, such as better insulation and double glazing. That will hit the small builder substantially and reduce energy saving, an area in which our national record is extremely poor. Indeed, in the past two years investment in energy-saving measures in buildings has fallen by 28 per cent.

There was an opportunity to use taxation or, failing that, Government grants as a way of encouraging home insulation, the fitting of double glazing and home improvements generally. If that opportunity had been taken, a boost would have been given to the small builder, while energy bills would have been reduced. It seems that a substantial opportunity has been lost.

I welcome the increase in child benefit, but the 25p increase for children other than the first is derisory. I suppose that the increase will provide for a pair of shoelaces. One constant problem for poorer families is the tax burden that falls on the low-paid because of the lack of progression in our tax system, which has only two income tax levels. All other European countries have far more sensitively graduated steps for the entry into paying income tax so that the taxation levels are much more progressive and much more sensitive to circumstances. In not changing our system of tax thresholds the Chancellor of the Exchequer missed an opportunity to relieve family poverty.

The Budget will do little for industry, jobs, the environment or the family. It produced great theatre at the very end of the statement, but it was largely irrelevant to our economy.

6.45 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) and the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) referred to economic forecasters——

Mr. John Garrett: I represent Norwich, South.

Mr. Jessel: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. Both he and my right hon. Friend placed some reliance on the accuracy of various economic forecasters. That is entirely wrong. Economic forecasters are about as reliable as old-fashioned weather forecasters. They never project with any precision what the state of the economy will be. The condition of the economy will depend on many variable factors, such as changes in the confidence of business entrepreneurs. Those changes will have an effect on their investment decisions. Other changes are dependent on international fluctuations in currencies or other economic factors. A modest upturn or downturn in economic activity, when contrasted with the predictions of economic forecasters, will make a relatively considerable difference in the Government's tax yield, and an exaggerated difference in the public sector borrowing requirement. All experience shows that economic forecasters are most unreliable and that we should place no reliance upon them.

Much the most important thing is to ensure that we get the economy right by reducing inflation, reducing interest rates and introducing steady growth in the economy. Although those objectives cannot be achieved at once, I believe that the policies that are set out in the Budget statement are the right ones to bring them about. They will be achieved safely and reliably without giving another twist to the inflationary spiral by the implementation of the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out. Only when we reduce inflation can we safely reduce interest rates.

I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is my constituency neighbour. I should be grateful to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury if he would be kind enough to convey my feelings to my right hon. Friend.

I commend the 15p increase——

Mr. John Garrett: Is the hon. Gentleman sure that he has referred to the right constituency?

Mr. Jessel: I have a very good constituency, thank you.

I commend the 15p increase in the tax on cigarettes. A direct relationship has been established between the smoking of cigarettes and the incidence of lung cancer, bronchitis and coronary heart disease. There was a disturbing increase in smoking by young people, especially young girls, in the second half of the 1980s. The increase in tax will make them think twice. It is entirely right and proper to use the Budget, and thereafter the Finance Bill, consistent with economic policy, to promote health. I am glad that the Chancellor has proposed it and I hope that he does it again next year.

I was delighted by the cut in community charge of £140 per person. In Twickenham, this will mean that the community charge goes down from £419 to £279. It takes some of the sting out of the community charge. I believe that most people will hardly notice the corresponding increase of 2·5 per cent. in value added tax.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): I hope to speak later on this subject. When the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is dealing with the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax, instead of invoking the phrase that the more those who are richer spend, the more they contribute, will he address himself to the facts? It is the proportion of the income that is spent on goods with value added tax which matters. The proportion is greater for low-income workers than for richer people.

Mr. Jessel: I respect the sincerity of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter), but I think that he is talking nonsense, because value added tax is not charged on the basic essentials of life—food; housing, whether by way of rent or mortgage; fuel, whether coal, electricity, gas or oil; or fares, whether on buses, trains or planes. There are a few items such as books and newspapers on which it is not currently charged, but those are the main items, and they make up a much larger proportion of the family budget of the poorest families than of the better-off families.

Mr. Leadbitter: The hon. Member appears to be wanting a fight, but all zero taxes affect the rich as well as the poor. The hon. Member for Hartlepool is not referring to zero taxes; I am referring to those value added taxes that everyone, whatever their income, must invoke. The proportion of that for people on low incomes is bound to be higher than that for people with bigger incomes.

Mr. Jessel: It is not bound to be so, and I have just explained why. Poorer families spend a larger proportion of their income on those basic essentials and the richer families tend to spend a larger proportion of their income on items on which value added tax is charged. Furthermore, the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax is not 2·5 on 100; there is already a 15 per cent. value added tax, so it is 2·5 per cent. on 115, and that is an increase of only just over 2 per cent. Once one has allowed for the fact that something like half the budget of the average family goes on essentials, however, the figure reduces to a little over 1 per cent. on the budget of a family—perhaps between 1 per cent. and 1·5 per cent.—and against that must be offset the reduction of £140 in the community charge.

That is why, at a time of falling inflation and soon, I hope, falling interest rates, I believe that I was right to say a couple of minutes ago that the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax will hardly be noticed.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is absolutely right. A family on average income whose community charge was reduced by £140 would have to spend more than £5,500 on items on which VAT is payable to spend the equivalent in additional VAT. Does my hon. Friend agree that that represents about half the national average income? In other words, someone on average income will almost certainly be better off by the reduction in community charge than worse off by the increase in value added tax.

Mr. Jessel: My hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) is absolutely right.

I return to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget speech about inflation:

"We must get inflation down, and this time we must keep it down. The overriding lesson of the past few years is that the battle against inflation is never won."

He went on to outline the evils of inflation and how they affect ordinary families.

I hope, however, that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will enlarge on what the Chancellor meant when he said that local authorities should play a part in the battle against inflation and that when community charges were to be reduced in the coming year

"the money will not be available to increase local authority spending."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 166, 180.]

This is very important because it is vital to get inflation down, and local authority spending is not always helpful in the battle to control inflation. Here, if my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham will allow me, I refer to an advertisement in *The Guardian* on 27 February for the appointment of a chief executive for the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham at a salary of £78,000. The advertisement was headed "Facing the Future" and part of its text read:

"We can offer you a negotiable salary of c. £78,000 plus a car and benefits package. Not to mention the satisfaction that comes from making a personal impact on the future of local government."

That negotiable salary of £78,000 should be contrasted with the top pay unit's monthly review of salaries and benefits for chief officers of local authorities of England and Wales. For the London boroughs and metropolitan districts with populations of up to 300,000, the maximum recommended amount was £50,600. It also compares with the current salary of a full admiral, a full general or an air chief marshal of £77,000, or the £59,000 salary of a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for running an entire Government Department.

This is getting out of hand and we must do more to stop it. It is a very serious matter in the battle to restrain inflation. It tends to have a knock-on effect on the salaries of chief officers of other local authorities and on the economy as a whole. I hope that the Public Accounts Committee will look at it. We must get a better grip on this particular part of public spending, and I hope that the Government will have more to say on how it can be done.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): In the same issue of *The Sunday Times*——

Mr. Jessel: It was in *The Guardian*.

Mr. Hind: If my hon. Friend had looked at *The Sunday Times* of the same week, he would have found that Hackney was also advertising for a chief executive at or about the same salary, as were Hammersmith and Fulham and one or two other Labour authorities. It is perhaps an indication of the difficulties of obtaining a chief executive of any ability who is prepared to undertake the running of an authority controlled by Labour, with all the rough and tumble and the likely breaking of the law that often takes place in certain cases. It has to do with market forces rather than the type of work.

Mr. Jessel: My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) is entirely right, but this type of extravagance is not confined to Labour local authorities.

Mr. Boateng *rose*—

Mr. Jessel: Liberal authorities such as Richmond upon Thames borough council are also sometimes extravagant. That council has in the past three years constructed a new town hall costing £11 million.

Mr. Boateng: How many chief executives did Lady Porter get through?

Mr. Jessel: I have not the slightest idea, but I bet that she did not pay them £78,000 a year.

Mr. Boateng: How much did she sell the drains for?

Mr. Jessel: That goes beyond the scope of this debate, and is nothing to do with the Budget and inflation control.

Mr. Carrington: Will my hon. Friend also reflect that the fact that Hammersmith and Fulham council spends such a lot on its chief executive may be in direct proportion to the £6 billion that it gambled on the money markets?

Mr. Jessel: That is relevant because, by any standards, £6 billion has an effect on the national economy.

The arts and heritage bring enormous benefits to the British economy. Theatres, concerts, opera, ballet, museums, art galleries and historic houses have a total turnover of more than £5 billion. More people in Britain go to the theatre than to football matches. The arts not only enhance the quality of life of the British people, but draw to our shores visitors who spend not only on the arts and heritage, but on hotels, restaurants, shopping and internal travel, all of which generate income, employment and foreign exchange. It is true that during the Gulf war traffic across the Atlantic to this country diminished, but it has begun to pick up again. Those overseas visitors, whether from other continents or Europe, come here not for our weather, but to see our arts, countryside and heritage.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts is strongly positive in his support and encouragement. The Treasury team that he has to consult has a history which suggests that they are likely to support the arts. The Prime Minister is also First Lord of the Treasury; when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer he sanctioned increases in the Arts Council budget, well above the inflation rate, in the two successive autumn statements of 1989 and 1990. Those decisions were shared by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury and by the present Prime Minister when he was Chancellor. The present Chancellor of the Exchequer was once a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the former Minister for the Arts, Lord St. John. The present Chief Secretary to the Treasury is a former Minister for the Arts, a job for which his enthusiasm was obvious in the short time in which he held the position.

I shall make two fiscal points relating to the arts. The first deals with the proposal for a national lottery for arts and sports. I wish that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Chancellor could have gone further than he did when he announced a scheme for a national arts and sports trust, which would raise £60 million a year. That is a substantial sum, but in an Adjournment debate last Thursday introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) said that if the figures for national lotteries in practically every continental country were extrapolated to the United Kingdom, the turnover would be £3 billion a year and the profit available for arts and sports, after expenses, administration and the distribution of prizes, would be about £1 billion a year. That is 15 or 17 times as much as the £60 million which the Chancellor of the Exchequer mentioned in relation to the other scheme. I hope that what was proposed yesterday will be no more than a stepping stone towards a national lottery, which I hope will come because it could do a massive amount of good for the sports and arts.

I now turn to the tax position of actors and actresses, and declare an interest as my wife is a singer and actress. In the pursuit of their profession, actors and actresses are not allowed to offset against income, for tax purposes, anything other than agents' fees. Actors and actresses often have to bear the cost of lodgings when they appear in performances away from home. They also have an abnormal number of auditions because of their separate appearances in different shows. Those are obviously much more frequent than the job interviews of people in different occupations. All those professional costs should come under schedule D so that they can be offset. I do not believe that it is enough to offset merely agents' fees. I hope that the Government will consult British Equity, the actors' union, and take another look at the matter because I believe that it would help the theatre industry, which is so important for tourism and for bringing visitors from overseas to the United Kingdom.

7.4 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I shall not venture too far into the arguments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel); nor do I wish to get involved in the quarrels about councils in Great Britain—we have enough problems at home. However, I say to the hon. Member that, if one third of the profits of a national lottery went to the arts, the punters would not come out of it well. I should have thought that those who invested their hard-earned cash in such a lottery would want a better return than that scheme would apparently give them.

Yesterday, I listened to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who said that he had just listened to the first social market budget. A friend of mine is reputed to have said that, whenever the term "social" is used before the word "market", it means that the market will be negated by the adjective.

I was gratified when the Chancellor, in his opening remarks, said that he was committed to at least one of the

[Mr. William Ross]

virtues underlying the Thatcher years, in that his central economic aim was to bring down inflation and keep it down. It is nice to turn the circle every 10 years or so, but I wish that the Government had managed to do so the first time.

I have been here long enough to know that not everything said by a Chancellor in a Budget speech is necessarily accurate, any more than autumn statements are. Certainly, Chancellors have not got it all that right lately. Some hon. Members have already belaboured the Treasury's forecast team; time will prove the accuracy of its forecasts and let us see, as events unfold, just what has been known and left unsaid.

I have a number of concerns about the economy and what we heard in the Budget yesterday. In a sense, we heard two Budget speeches yesterday—one was the normal Budget speech and the other related solely to the money that is to be put into local government. I shall begin where the Chancellor finished: with the £4·5 billion, which will have vast consequences for all parties in the House and in the country that fight elections, and for the future of local government—its structure, functions and finance. Anyone who thinks that it will not lives in a dream world.

Unless the Bill to be presented is carefully designed, we shall get into even deeper difficulties. The Bill will deal only with the first step in a much larger reorganisation of local government. We see here the abandonment of the principle of the direct link between those who pay local government taxation and those who spend it, the councils.

I am concerned about that, because we are moving too far away from the principle of accountability, which the community charge tried to address, perhaps not successfully. But that issue will remain with us. If we reach the stage when accountability disappears, local government as we have known it in this country for a long period will be utterly swept away—there is no escape from that conclusion.

We in the Ulster Unionist party believe that everyone should pay something towards the cost of local government. Therefore, the Bill that we shall see tomorrow is of great importance. We had two basic objections to the community charge. One was that Northern Ireland was not treated in exactly the same way as the rest of the United Kingdom—a problem that we have always had. Our other objection was more serious in its application —that we were simply replacing one crude tax with another. Local government taxation needs a wider tax base. The revenue that local government collects in other countries, especially in America, is specific to the functions that local government bodies perform.

I must disagree with the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) who said that the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT would work out at only 2 per cent. I am sorry, but we are moving from a VAT rate of 15 per cent. to one of 17·5 per cent. That is my understanding and I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will agree with me rather than with the hon. Gentleman. That 2·5 per cent. is important.

We may have to wait until tomorrow to find out, but I would like to know whether that 2·5 per cent.—that widening of the tax base to which I have no great objection if it is done properly—will be specific to one level of local government or to a specific function of local government. If so, we are going down a sensible road. If not, we are simply throwing money at the problem of local government finance. Doing that in such a panic-stricken atmosphere will eventually put us in an even worse hole than we are in with the community charge which many hon. Members seem to forget was introduced because of the panic-stricken state of the Conservative party in Scotland as a result of the revaluation there.

In the political arguments between parties in the House, hon. Members seem to forget the root causes of the problems of local government finance, which are very real and which would not go away even if the rates were restored. Because we in Northern Ireland have been able to stand back, we have taken a more jaundiced but perhaps more accurate view of the real difficulties of the Government and the difficulties which any Government would face in trying to put local government on a sound basis, where people see their money spent and know what it is spent on, and so hold their councils responsible for its spending.

We do not believe that the fire service, the police or education, to name but three of the functions of local government, should be completely under Government control. That would be a wrong step. The more money is put into local government by the Government, the more the Government's hand will control every aspect of it. That is inherently wrong. We must create a system of local government with proper financing which not only works but which commands a consensus across the House.

Looking at local government in Great Britain from the perspective of Northern Ireland, we see councils fighting a national battle when they should be getting on with administering efficiently their local government functions, which, far too often, does not happen. The hon. Member for Twickenham touched on some cases where money was literally being thrown away in local government. That is the impression that I as an outsider get, and I think that it is an impression shared by many in the community outside. We must seek a consensus which works even if there is a political battle in the House to get it. The sooner we start getting such a consensus, the better.

It would be false to believe that to do away with one tier of local government would result in a better service. I do not believe that the three services that I have just mentioned can be dealt with at district council level. A wider geographical area with perhaps a rather larger population than is contained in a district is needed if they are to be provided efficiently. If we do away with a tier and have only single-tier local councils, there will be great difficulties in the future. There is a real need to maintain a two-tier structure in future in local government, and I hope that the Government will not lightly abandon that. If they do, they will be straight back into another and possibly even deeper boghole.

Another question to which I would like an answer tonight concerns the application of the 2·5 per cent. VAT increase in Northern Ireland. Enough has already been said in exchanges across the House this afternoon to show that it will not receive universal acclaim or affection, but I am curious about what will happen to rates bills in Northern Ireland in the coming financial year as a result of that 2·5 per cent. VAT increase. How will the electorate in Northern Ireland who are paying the rates bill—a very different tax from the community charge—receive the average £140 per head rebate? That is a question which

everyone in Northern Ireland would like answered and answered soon. But perhaps the Government have not yet worked that out.

I am sure that before the debate is finished we will hear more about these matters, not least about the effect of VAT on low-income families where it will have a different impact. Both the hon. Members for Twickenham and for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter), who took part in an argument across the Floor of the House a few minutes ago, had a lot going for them. That concerns the nuts and bolts of the tax, which I would like to see explored more deeply.

There is, as I have said, already far too much central control of council work. Hon. Members from all parties would desire less. But if there is to be less, some of the councils will have to show a sight more responsibility, and perhaps party leaders will have to impose more responsibility on them right across the board. Some of the behaviour that we have witnessed is not good for Britain, for democracy or for the people on the ground.

Unfortunately, Thursday's Bill will be rammed through. I hope that when it is being rammed through all hon. Members will have a glimmering of the anger that we in Northern Ireland feel at the Order in Council procedure which is used for changing the law in Northern Ireland. The statement made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland today was another vivid illustration of that. The Government do not dare to bring before the House a Bill to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity.

But the Bill on Thursday will not be the end of the local government argument. It simply means that one method of financing local government is being changed, or perhaps only modified. Far ranging changes will still be needed and any changes to the financing of local government will also affect its structure and functions.

We have a long way to go. I hope to take some part in future debates to explore the matter more deeply. We in Northern Ireland would like to see a common system of local government throughout the United Kingdom, even if there is some variation from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. We would like to see a system which is recognisable from one end of the kingdom to the other.

The measures that were announced for business were welcome and they will help, but when the nuts and bolts are examined, business will not be universally content because in one way or another considerable burdens are being placed upon it. I hope that by the end of this debate the Chancellor and his colleagues on the Treasury Bench will have heard a fair number of well founded criticisms of their proposals.

Unfortunately, we were told nothing about interest rates yesterday. They are the greatest burden that business has to bear at present. The sooner that interest rates come down and stay down the better, but that is tied to inflation, and we do not want negative interest rates again. Across the board, the business community is hoping for an early and a fairly large cut in interest rates but I appreciate—and I hope that all those who cried out for entry into the ERM appreciate—that the Government lost an enormous amount of freedom of action on entry and cannot make the cuts in interest rates that they would have been able to make a year ago.

Business, especially manufacturing, needs more investment. Investment is falling and I should like to think that it will rise rapidly and soon. I agree with those hon. Members who have said that manufacturing industry is the source of a nation's wealth. Although service industries provide jobs, they do not provide national wealth in the way that manufacturing does. The more encouragement that is given to manufacturing the better, and I regret that more incentives to invest are not given in the Budget.

I also regret that the inventor seems to be overlooked. We must do more for the fellow in the back shed who is up to something. Even in these days when huge sums are spent on research and development, individual inventors still come up with a nice idea which will provide 40 or 50 jobs when it gets to the market. Getting to the market is not simple, cheap or easy. Often inventors do not want to let go of their investment as it is the only chance that they have to make a few quid. We should be doing something to help them with the cost of patents, which can be a considerable cost to the individual.

We should also help with development costs. I am always telling the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that, even if some of the money were lost, it would be far better to spend money on our own people than on some fellow with a big hat and a Texas drawl, who usually collects a few million and heads back to Texas again. I would prefer a few million pounds to be lost every year on promoting our own home-grown inventors than to hand millions to overseas people who only come here to try to defraud the Government and the country.

I also note that the increase in value added tax may well affect the capacity of some firms to pay money to charities. The VAT increase may not be universally acceptable to charitable organisations.

I noted with regret that the Chancellor once more praised entry into the exchange rate mechanism as a secure framework against inflation and said that we needed the discipline of the ERM. I always thought that that discipline was inherent in the claim that Anyman made whenever he was asking folk to vote for him. I always thought that people elected Governments to exercise discipline in financial matters. I point out to Ministers that the Germans did not need ERM to succeed after the war: all they needed was financial discipline. It could well be said that such discipline was imposed by the Bundesbank. I wonder why other Governments have not exercised the same discipline since the war. All it takes is the guts to do what is right when the right moment comes and not to bend with every passing wind.

If Governments accepted and imposed that discipline we would not have needed the ERM and we would have the freedom of action to change interest rates whenever it suited us. That might have been useful to the Conservative party at the present time.

In election after election the Conservative party has attacked the Labour party for not exercising financial discipline. Now we are told that the Conservative party needs someone else to prop it up in that financial discipline. It is a sad failing and a fall from the high standards which their predecessors employed.

I hope that the forecast that inflation will be down to 4 per cent. within a year is correct. Those of us who study past forecasts will not be as sure that it will happen as the Government Front Bench is. Considering that we have repaid £26 billion of our national debt during the past few years, which is a vast and welcome change from the rake's progress which characterised financial behaviour for many decades, I cannot but listen with dismay to the prophecy that there will be a minimum £8 billion deficit next year, and possibly a good deal more. We are told that it may be much larger the year after.

[Mr. William Ross]

What really stuck in my gullet was the fact that the excuse given was that it was merely because of our place in the business cycle. If one can make that excuse for debts, will it also be applied to the £26 billion in repayments? How can one say that a deficit is a result of the cycle and in the same breath not have to admit that the repayments are a result of the cycle? I do not think that they are altogether the result of a cycle; they are the result of good management or mismanagement. I do not look with any pleasure upon the return of a deficit to Government finances.

The Chancellor said that failure in generations past has put a burden upon us and that, if we do not get back to a balanced budget, we will put a burden on future generations. That is a paraphrase but is basically the meaning of his words. However, yesterday he did not say that he was hoping to get back to a state of affairs where he could make repayments. He was merely looking for balanced budgets in the medium term. Therefore, one must accept that there has been a massive departure from the position for a few happy years when public sector debt was repaid.

I hope that it will dawn upon Ministers that many people in this country would like the public sector debt to be eliminated eventually, or at least reduced to a much lower level than at present. I am talking not about the percentage of gross national product but of a real decrease in cash terms in what we owe to the rest of the world.

As far as the taxation changes are concerned, I am disappointed that the fuel tax has risen so much because it increases the problems for rural dwellers, raises transport costs and is inherently inflationary in some respects. If the Government had decided to do that, why did they not go the whole hog? Why did they not simply replace the road fund licence while they were at it? That would have meant that everyone paid and there would not be so many tax dodgers floating around.

The tobacco tax increase, which has been so widely welcomed, will not be so widely welcomed in areas of the country where there is a tobacco industry. Tobacco is dangerous and I do not smoke myself—thank God, I never have. However, that increase will cost quite a lot of jobs in Ulster and will not necessarily stop people smoking. It might mean that we suck in imports of a lower quality and thus do more damage to people than any apparent good that may come about. The increase, which is above the level of inflation, was unwise at this time.

The mortgage interest relief changes may have only a minor effect upon house prices and may stop them taking off again. I certainly hope that that is the case, but I am curious as to whether it signals a slow shift from the special treatment of mortgages for housing purchase, which has been the case for many years, towards treating them like any other capital investment.

Other changes to be welcomed are those to capital gains tax and inheritance tax. Given the drop in the price of agricultural land, we are getting to a stage where most working farmers—rather than large estate owners—will not have to worry much about insuring themselves against inheritance tax because their farms will soon be well below the limit.

Child benefit has been considered time and time again as a means of helping families with children and it is probably still the best way to do so. The Chancellor said yesterday that, while he had considered child tax allowances, he had come down against them. Because of the changes made, I think that child benefit will be with us for the foreseeable future, and we should try to ensure that all mothers get the benefit of that money.

Yesterday, there was no mention of privatisation income. I have had a quick glance through the Red Book, and I cannot find it there either. I wonder how much money we shall get from Northern Ireland Electricity? Frankly, I hope that the Government's efforts to put that legislation through the House fail, although, sadly, I fear that they will not. There simply cannot be privatisation and competition in the Northern Ireland context. We were in effect told today that one large power station would supply far more electricity than the Province needs, so how on earth can there be privatisation if we are to get into that state? And that is bound to come, because the existing plant is wearing out.

One of the two Budgets is a thing of bits and pieces, many of which we welcome and some of which will have unforeseen consequences. The other contains a massive change to the system of local government finance. The effects of the first are quantifiable, but experience suggests that those of the second cannot be reduced so easily to common sense and specific figures.

Once again, battle is joined over the financing, powers and structure of local government, and I think that that battle will continue for a long time. We are entering an unknown minefield, and, if we are not careful, the whole system of local government as we know it will be swept away. That will harm the country, local government and the people who live in the areas concerned, and, ultimately, will cost far more. We should not dare to bring such matters under the control of central Government. We must search assiduously for an acceptable means of financing local government that will keep it in sensible hands within the community.

7.30 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I agree with the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) that the Bill which will be presented tomorrow will by no means complete the process that is required for reform of local government—it needs a thorough overhaul. It must also be accountable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) said, offering enormous salaries to chief executives does not promote accountability and has a detrimental effect on other authorities.

I congratulate the Government on producing such a sane and sensible Budget in the present circumstances. For one thing, the Budget will provide encouragement for small and large businesses. As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East observed, it is important that our industries should be helped to build themselves up to be able to compete with those of our European partners. I think that that is what the hon. Gentleman meant—and I see that he is nodding his agreement.

This country recognises that savings, too, should be encouraged, and I am glad to see that the Government also accept the importance of that. I am not talking about personal equity plans or the tax-exempt special savings account; I am talking about the accumulation of wealth by all sections of the community—not just the top section—to provide them with reserves to fall back on and a base

for their retirement. The encouragement of such savings, like the encouragement of home ownership, is Conservative party policy.

I hate the way in which managing directors are given enormous freedom to purchase shares in their companies while the workers are denied it. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to want to ensure that the same facilities are offered, in a smaller way, to workers who, having become shareholders, will become more interested and involved in the work of their company. The widening of share ownership serves two purposes: it builds up a capitalist society among all classes, and it gives the workers an interest in the work that they are doing with their own hands.

I note that special provision has been made for those —married women in particular—who wish to use their initiative and train for an occupation that will be of use to the country in the future. I also welcome the help that has been given to charities.

I want to say something about local government, because what was said by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has somehow been incorporated into the Budget. I think that the Government were right to raise VAT by 2·5 per cent., but I am not sure that I like the idea of that becoming permanent. Hon. Members have mentioned a property tax. Having spent 20 years on the rating and valuation tribunal in London, I find it terribly difficult to value houses. It is almost impossible. One house may be given a completely different valuation from the one next to it. Linking valuations with a property tax will mean an enormous undertaking if we are to get the tax right, and it will be as unfair as the present system.

Of course, successive Governments were wrong not to increase rateable values. That, indeed, gave rise to the poll tax, which was the only alternative to a property tax that the present Government could see. I disagree with the hon. Member for Londonderry, East—I think that the fire, police and education services should be financed directly by the Exchequer. After all, the Exchequer pays a considerable sum to local government—about 48 per cent. It is not all raised through local rates. Financing those services centrally would merely mean that the Exchequer would contribute a little more.

Although central Government provides local government with money—and is to provide more—local authorities must be made far more accountable. Councils should be run not by officers, but by elected members. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East is right to say that a complete reappraisal of the local government system is needed.

I was pleased to learn of the help that the Government will give to seamen. It may seem a small point, but such help is important to the Merchant Navy, which is declining. We want British sailors on board those ships, and we welcome the concessions that have been given to them. The same applies to those employed in the Gulf, who, through no fault of their own, were forced to leave because of the war and have been heavily penalised fiscally. No doubt the Ministry of Defence had a word in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's ear. The tax on alcohol and tobacco strikes me as reasonable. After all, they are luxuries.

I have always advocated a move from direct to indirect taxation. Tomorrow's Bill is part of that, but I should like more to be done in that regard. Other countries in Europe operate such systems, and run their affairs very successfully.

I welcome this excellent Budget, and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on it.

7.38 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): If the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn) will forgive me, I shall not take up all the points that he made. I shall deal with one later—the question of local government. First, I want to deal directly with his point about savings.

I am the first to agree that savings are very important to the country and its citizens. Tragically, however, one of the results of the Government's 12-year tenure is that savings have reached their lowest-ever level as a percentage of net disposable income. Despite the various incentive schemes introduced in last year's Budget, savings still have not taken off. After the introduction of those incentive schemes—building societies would be the first to tell us this —people merely transferred money that they had already invested from one savings account to the greater tax-incentive savings account. The tragic truth is that, as a percentage of net disposable income, savings are at their lowest level ever.

Over the past 12 months we have seen a traumatic recession and we have still not reached the depths of it. We have seen a dramatic increase in unemployment, which is beginning to accelerate. We have also seen some spectacular business collapses. If anyone had told the people of Glasgow or the west of Scotland that the massive Lewis's department store in Argyll street would go bankrupt in 1991, they would not have believed it, and nor would the people of Manchester and the other cities in which that store was located. It was an institution in those cities. We have seen the recent spectacular collapse of the International Leisure Group and Air Europe. We have seen an increase in inflation, which we have also seen begin to decrease.

Against that backdrop, the Government have failed at every by-election to hold some of the safest Conservative seats. The Liberal Democrats won Eastbourne and Ribble Valley and that is matched by the fact that the Labour party won Mid-Staffordshire with an equally massive swing. Sometimes I think that the Labour party does not give itself credit for the stupendous victory of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal).

There is a feeling—my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spoke on television about Ribble Valley—that those seats will revert to the Conservative party at the next election. I part company with my hon. Friend because the electorate are giving a great deal of thought to the way in which they will cast their vote. Political parties will, at their peril, take for granted the view that those seats will return to what is loosely described as their natural home at the general election. I do not believe that, but it remains to be seen whether my analysis is correct.

I wondered where the Budget had come from. As I listened to the Chancellor introducing his Budget, I realised that it was not the Government's Budget. In fact, the Chief Secretary told us today where it came from. He said that the Confederation of British Industry announced last night that the Budget contained every proposal that it had made to the Treasury. He also said that the Institute

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

of Directors announced last night that the Budget contained every proposal that it had made to the Chancellor. The Chief Secretary also told us that the Association of British Chambers of Commerce had announced that the Budget contained its proposals. The spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), said that the Budget contained everything that his party had suggested to the Government. Where was the Government's input? It is fairly obvious that the Budget was a hotch potch, put together against the backdrop of the panic of the past year and the prospect of a general election.

I welcome some aspects of the Budget. For example, I welcome the increase in the VAT registration threshold for small businesses to £35,000. I welcome also, although it was not a financial incentive, the Chancellor's determination to encourage Customs and Excise to persuade companies of a certain level of turnover to pay value added tax when the account is paid rather than when it is sent out. I welcome also the increase in child benefit.

It was a pleasure to listen to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who displayed a far superior grasp of the economy and its future needs than did the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary put together. My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear that had there been increases in line with inflation and, had the Labour party been in power, we would have been starting child benefit from a base of £9 per child.

I enter a note of personal sympathy. All my life I have suffered the disadvantgage of being a twin. My brother is 10 minutes older than me and, for the life of me, I do not understand why my mother would have received more money for him than for me. I cannot accept that. Perhaps the Minister will explain what happens in the event of multiple births and how they are separated for the payment of child benefit. I am glad that the Government have moved away from their refusal to increase child benefit because that was inflicting hardship and suffering on families.

One of the greatest disappointments in the Chief Secretary's speech was that he did not mention unemployment. The Budget will not put a single person back to work. Indeed, yesterday the Chancellor made it clear that unemployment will increase. I heard forecasts today of unemployment reaching 3 million and the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir. I. Gilmour) forecast 4 million. That is unacceptable. A total of 2 million is unacceptable and will severely damage Britain's social fabric. It will introduce trends into the social fabric which will be difficult to deal with by whichever Government are in power if they are not dealt with now.

If the Government are prepared to sit back and allow unemployment to rise to 3 million or 4 million, the quicker they are out of power, the better. I say that not only for the Labour party, although I declare a vested interest, but for the people of the United Kingdom. We simply could not tolerate that level of unemployment.

There is no hope in the Budget. I am speaking from the point of view of a Scottish constituency. There is no hope for the work force at Ravenscraig or for the work force at Rosyth naval dockyard. There is no hope for the 1,000 textile workers who lost their jobs in my constituency when clothing manufacturers had to close because of the recession.

I hope that the Minister will pay attention here. The Government wax eloquent about the need for share ownership among employees. I am in favour of that, but I hope that the Government will not give the impression that employees' jobs are protected just because they happen to own shares in the company. I can tell the Government a different story. ICI is world famous for its employee share ownership scheme, but in Grangemouth in my constituency, only two weeks ago, ICI announced that 250 workers—or shareholders—were to lose their jobs. In anyone's language that is a warning on employee share ownership. We should not give the impression, as the Government have done, that owning shares protects employees' jobs. It does not, and we should not mislead working people in that way.

I shall now refer to the link between VAT and local government finance. As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said, there has been a debate about whether the increase in VAT was 2·5 per cent. In my view, an increase of 2·5p on 15p in the pound is an increase of 16 per cent. If the Government were reducing VAT by 2·5p they would have claimed that that was a 17 per cent. reduction, but because VAT is going up by 2·5p they say that it is only a 2·5 per cent. increase. That increase is to finance the review of poll tax so that poll tax payers can pay £140 per head less.

That is one way of financing the poll tax cut, but the Government have chosen another way of raising revenue, too. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Londonderry, East said about there being no mention of the proceeds of privatisation sales, the Chancellor announced yesterday that the Government intend to sell at least part of their 48 per cent. shareholding in British Telecom. Part of the money is being raised by the Government selling public assets. The sale may affect the BT pension fund—I hope that the Minister will consider that question.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) challenged the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to say whether he was in favour of the £140 per head reduction in poll tax that will be effected by the Bill to be introduced tomorrow. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said that he was in favour of it, but I am not in favour of the millionaire in his mansion getting a reduction of £140—he spends more on cigars in a week than that—and the old-age pensioner in her humble home getting a £140 reduction, too. The millionaire in his mansion should get nothing and the old-age pensioner should get three times £140. That would at least begin to approach social justice, or we might begin to be, as the Prime Minister put it, a nation at ease with itself.

We have not yet seen the Bill to be introduced tomorrow, but we understand that it will contain only one or two clauses. Anyone who thinks that it will be universally accepted has another thought coming. In arranging for a £140 per head rebate the Government have made the same fundamental error as they made in introducing the poll tax. Where everyone pays the same everyone will get the same refund. No one can convince me that the millionaire in his mansion is entitled to £140 back, in the same way as the old-age pensioner in her humble home.

We are talking about a complete review of local government. We are told that the Budget set the scene for

it, so it is relevant to the debate. The hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead mentioned local government, too. I shall not be here in the next Parliament so I shall not have a say in what happens. Let me warn the Government, and my hon. Friends who may have responsibility if a review is to be undertaken, that we should not do what was done when local government was reorganised in England and Wales in 1972 and in Scotland in 1973. The democratic element was reduced by 50 per cent. We cut in half the number of elected councillors, and in the process increased the bureaucratic element by more than 50 per cent. Everyone in the House knows that bureaucracy in local government grew because there was no democracy there to stop it.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House talk about local accountability. They should get off councillors' backs. That applies to all parties—I do not make a political point. Councillors from all parties do an excellent job in difficult circumstances. When the poll tax was introduced we were told that it would get the Government out of local government, that the Government would not interfere, and that local government would be accountable to the electors in each area. Local electors would deal with overspending. That concept was soon shed, first with poll tax capping and now with the Bill that will be brought before us tomorrow. We shall see the Secretary of State for the Environment at the Dispatch Box making the biggest climbdown in political history. But there will be a reduction in interest rates, too, to take some of the spotlight off that climbdown—let there be no ifs and buts about it. I choose my words carefully when I say that the Conservative party is the first party in the political history of the United Kingdom to put a price on a vote. The Government will try to buy the vote of every person over the age of 18 in this country for £140 a time—that is their strategy for the next election. Anyone who thinks that the British electorate will fall for that con trick has another thought coming.

I saw the Minister of State on "Kilroy" this morning. My better side tempted me to feel sorry for her, but my realistice side said that she deserved all that she was getting. She got a going over from people affected by the Budget.

We have heard a lot about the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the chambers of commerce. Just as I accept that sometimes trade union leaders do not speak for their members, I know that the CBI, the IOD and the chambers of commerce do not speak for their members. On "Newsnight" last night the managing director of a furniture manufacturing company in Bristol with 270 employees and a turnover of £50 million tore the Budget apart. He was asked if he had ever voted Conservative and he said, "Yes, but I am seriously considering whether I will ever vote Conservative again." That is the sort of comment on the Budget that we are hearing from the business world. Business men can see through the Budget. This is not a universally acceptable Budget and its backdrop is one of disaster after disaster.

The Budget was introduced with the general election in prospect. My interest in the date of the election differs from my interest in the election's outcome. I am interested in the election's date because I want to know whether I will be going home in June to start to grow chrysanthemums and gladioli and to tend my garden again or whether my departure will be delayed until October, November or even until next year.

The Government are taking a massive gamble. The Budget is the last throw of the dice for a desperate Government. If their gamble fails, we will see a political slaughter in this country such as we have never seen before. The Government are gambling with the future of the people of this country and the people know what is happening. That is why by this time next year my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East will be Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will be Prime Minister. There will be a Labour Government, much to the joy and relief of the people of Great Britain.

8.1 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The city of Troy had only one Cassandra, but on the Opposition Benches today there has been a flock of Cassandras. Opposition Members have been forecasting more and more disasters. They have claimed that the public will take us to' task because we are reducing the community charge. How far from reality are the Opposition? I have been chums with the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) for many years. Why go out with such a black outlook? He should have faith in his country and in the work force. He should have faith——

Mr. Boateng: Get out.

Mr. Hill: Well, the hon. Gentleman can replace me if he thinks that I am not doing my job very well. Opposition Members should have faith in their country. The stock market is buoyant, the foreign exchange is steady, the ERM is not affecting us and we will be able to reduce interest rates in the very short term. In the face of all that, why all this gloom and despondency?

It is clear that the Opposition received a terrible shock yesterday. I watched their faces. The Liberal Democrats, like Labour Members, were decimated——

Mr. Boateng: Where are they now?

Mr. Hills: Obviously the shock was so great that they are now huddling together somewhere trying to create another policy on something.

I am almost inclined to apologise for yesterday's shock. I did not know what was going to happen. If I had known, I would have told some of my chums to relieve the shock. Some of them might have had cardiac arrests. I do not like the phrase "shooting foxes" because we might lose the animal lobby, but there is no doubt that several very promising attacks on the Budget had to be completely rewritten as a result of yesterday's shock.

I sense a great upsurge of relief. At long last we have a Cabinet that is determined to act. I want to recount the history of the community charge in Southampton.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman voted for it.

Mr. Hill: I know, and I have written many letters saying that I cannot exonerate myself. However, when I first voted for the community charge, the estimated charge for Southampton was £178. I said to myself, "Okay. We're a low-rated area, but on the other hand £178 is quite reasonable". So I supported it. On the second occasion that I voted——

Mr. Boateng: How many times in all?

Mr. Hill: We voted on it twice. As a loyal supporter of the Government I voted for something that I believed would be much better than the rates. That evening, there was a minor rebellion on the Conservative Benches and I was appalled because my first loyalty has always been to the party.

Mr. Boateng: Never mind the country.

Mr. Hill: I believe that the country is best served by the Conservative party and that fits in with my sense of loyalty.

On that evening, I was told by members of the Cabinet who are no longer members of the Cabinet, "There's no need to worry, James. It'll be about £278 and we think you can sell that." When the Labour-controlled council announced its community charge of £317, I very nearly fell over. I thought that no one in the low-rated area of Southampton, Test would be able to pay it. A real cloud had appeared.

I kept hoping that others would view matters as I viewed them. Slowly, but surely, that began to happen. No matter what the Liberals have or have not done, they fought a good election in Ribble Valley. The public came out clearly on the community charge: they said, "Get rid of it." We were then accused of dithering and all the rest of it. When the dagger came out and went straight through the heart of the Leader of the Opposition, we were no longer dithering——

Mr. Boateng: The Conservtive party stabbed its own leader in the back before that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Hill: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that was said by the hon. Gentleman from a sedentary position.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) will have his chance later.

Mr. Hill: I am pleased that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are protecting me from the violent elements on the Opposition Front Bench. I need as much of that protection as I can get. The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said that someone was stabbed. It was a perfectly democratically arranged leadership election. It would be counter-productive to consider what happened in those days. Why should we always think of the past? That brings me back to the Cassandras. Opposition Members always think about the terrible things that have happened and do not believe that anything good can happen in future.

The community charge will be reduced by £140 a head throughout the land, regardless of people's incomes, but we are already beginning to hear objections to that. Council leaders and treasurers claim on television that the notices cannot be issued in time. They claim that they will be working night and day and that it will cost another £60 million. They want more staff and, no doubt, longer tea breaks.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will introduce a Bill on Tuesday that will incorporate everything that we have said about the community charge today. I hope that the Bill will include a provision to the effect that there is no need to issue another lot of invoices or bills simply because those bills must be issued before 1 April. People have enough savvy to strike £140 off their existing bills or, if they normally pay 10 cheques during the year, to strike £14 off their cheques. Let us at least save £60 million and much hard work for local authorities.

My local authority was dilatory when housing benefits were introduced, and it is just as dilatory now in respect of exemptions. People are getting two or three forms. The council is writing to the dead and to people under 18. That is all part of the system. The computerised society, which many hon. Members do not like, is not as efficient as we are told. I should not mind at all if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State were to table an amendment to the Bill.

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hill: No. The hon. Gentleman had a good innings. My goodness, I sat here wondering what he had to do with the community charge. Irishmen are always pleasant and enjoyable to talk to, but not to listen to for too long. Today I thought that the hon. Gentleman spoke for a little too long.

The increase in VAT to 17·5 per cent. will be the source of a little grievance. That is possibly the hardest aspect of the Budget that I will have to sell to my constituents. It is difficult when the hon. Member for Falkirk, East accuses us of wasting more money on the community charge. Before long, everyone will realise that the additional VAT will pay for the extra help with the community charge. The majority of families will readily pay another 2·5p in VAT. I hope that the child benefit policies that have been introduced will make up for that increase.

Debates on business are not welcome in this House. We are always told that millionaires live in mansions. People ask, "What about the Japanese, Germans and others?" Millionaires who live in mansions can be Japanese, German, Irish or English. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East says that, for some reason, a person who invests in industry must be a millionaire. I have not yet heard of any trade union groups investing in industry, but no doubt I will hear about that later. Private investment mainly comes from people with money. Not all people who invest in the marketplace or the stock market or people who invest privately live in mansions. Some of them are humble—one can hardly tell that they have a penny to spare. Nevertheless, the main way to attract the attention of those people is exactly what has been done with corporation tax. Reductions in corporation tax from 35 per cent. to 34 per cent. in 1990-91 and to 33 per cent. in 1991-92 will do more than a thousand speeches by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I shall not be here.

Mr. Hill: No, the hon. Gentleman may not be here, but that is the way to encourage investment.

There are many items in the Budget for the small business man. Small business men are people such as tobacconists who supply workers with cigarettes, milk and so on. There is no doubt that the small business man has been under pressure. If we can raise the profit limit of small businesses to £250,000—it used to be called the small business relief, but I am sure that the new Chancellor will call it something else—we will help business enormously. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor recognises small shopkeepers' problems. He has raised the VAT registration threshold by nearly £10,000 to £35,000. A

small shopkeeper can now have a trade of £700 a week and not even have to register for VAT. How different that is from what happened in 1979.

There are problems with personal taxation. I have one little grumble. It is not like me to grumble, but personal allowances and all age-related allowances are raised in line with inflation, whereas the married couples' allowance for the under-65s is unchanged. Why? What is behind that policy? Is it the Conservative party, the party of the settled family? Is it more possible for two people——

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): The standstill is offset by the increase in child benefit.

Mr. Hill: I do not mind the Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), or anyone else saying that. Two single people living in a house get two personal allowances, but for a married couple the position is unchanged. *[Interruption.]* Luckily my hon. Friend is not allowed to speak. *[Interruption.]* Married couples had better get on and have a few children? Is that what I am told by my Government? I hope that that is not so. We have had that problem in respect of council accommodation and so on.

One extremely good point that has not been mentioned is tax relief. *[Interruption.]* Would hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Front Bench kindly listen? Tax relief for businesses would help to provide equipment for schools and other educational establishments. That is to be encouraged by hon. Members on both sides of the House. If a benefactor wants to present a kit of footballs, football jerseys, soccer boots and so on, why should he not be allowed tax relief on it? Exactly the same applies to the arts. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) made a good plea. That side of our social life needs more assistance. A lottery would have been absolutely right. I am sure that we shall get around to that in the not-too-distant future.

There has been tax avoidance through the use of non-residential trusts. That matter is almost white hot. The Jersey island of Bergerac has been used for many non-residential trusts. People gain. They pay only 20 per cent. on the island of Jersey, yet practically all their investments are held in the United Kingdom. It will be an extremely interesting Finance Bill. I look forward to listening to the reasons why non-residential trusts should be closed.

Opposition Members are aggrieved that there was a reference in the Budget to British Telecom shares being sold off. I do not see why they should be aggrieved, but I rather like the idea that the shares should be sold from high street shops. I like to think that Marks and Sparks or Boots or almost any other high-street shop will be able to sell shares over the counter. Although we have talked about selling shares over the counter, we have always been strapped into the stock market and it has been the brokers or the banks who have made the money. Now, however, there is a chance that shares will be sold from high-street shops. I hope that we get 100 per cent. support from the Opposition on that.

I represent a conurbation and have had the problem of having to go along with the community charge. I have never been happy about it. When someone said on "Newsnight" last night that a stake had been driven through the heart of the community charge, I thought that it was good news. I sat there smiling and today I am still smiling. I am afraid that it will mean a desperately poor election for the Opposition. I am sorry that a lot of Opposition faces will disappear. Nothing will be safe. Once we get the policy into place and explain it properly, I am sure that we will be returned overwhelmingly.

8.20 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). However, having been watching the clock, I must advise him that it was a bit rich of him to chide my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) for going on a bit: I can honestly tell him that he was not far behind. I had the same feeling when the hon. Gentleman was speaking as he obviously had when my hon. Friend was speaking. However, I richly enjoyed his speech and the fact that he found bits of the Budget as laughable as many of us found them. I assure the House that I shall be briefer than both those hon. Gentlemen.

The Budget has been marked by two facets—one of fear and one of panic. As many hon. Members have shown, chief among the manifestations of the panic and fear have been the Government's desperate attempts to get themselves off the hook on which they have impaled themselves over the poll tax. As we all know, they have been defending the poll tax both inside and outside the House for many months. They did not listen to the advice of the experts or to the interested organisations. Most of all, they failed to listen to the electors.

Generally, most panic measures fail when they are put under any scrutiny. The electors of this country would be mistaken to think that only the poll tax has attracted ill-thought-out and hasty measures from the Government, but, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have already mentioned many of them, I do not intend to go over that ground again.

I had originally intended to raise the problems experienced by direct labour organisations, which are being penalised for ensuring that a high level of apprenticeship is maintained in the construction industry, and which are being hampered by the compulsory competitive tendering processes. Many of the apprentices who have been trained in the construction industry then go into the private sector. Although in some cases as many as 75 per cent. do so, the private sector is not playing as big a part as the direct labour organisations in continuing that process. However, as I realise that the arguments on that are lengthy, I shall not stress that point tonight.

It will be no surprise to many hon. Members who know me that I intend to highlight a crucial area of the nation's life that will suffer enormously as a result of yesterday's announcements. I refer to sport. Given the Government's hype about the Budget proposals for funding sport, hon. Members may find it curious that I am raising this. However, like most of the Government's dealings with the sporting industry, the Budget is yet another case of broken promises and smokescreen tactics, coupled with the hasty and last minute cobbling together of a scheme to avoid a national lottery, to which the hon. Member for Test referred. I shall seek to explain how yesterday's announcements can be described as a "conning Budget for sport". I hope that the Minister is listening. The House should consider many aspects of this issue, not just the question of a national lottery.

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

The Budget certainly does not contain any move to abolish corporation tax for sport, at which many people, including the Minister for Sport, hinted. Along with the Prime Minister, the Minister has been happy to bask in the glow of the initial, but now proven sadly misguided, title of "the dream ticket for sport". I hope that the author of that title is eating his words tonight. The Budget has delivered a rude awakening to any who may have shared that view.

In January, the Minister for Sport promised *The Mail on Sunday* that he would

"look very hard at the financial structure of sports so that they can be released from having to pay corporation tax",

and professed to feeling

"very strongly about the tax sport has to pay".

He added:

"I believe we can change this and get more money into grass-roots sport",

but those worthy promises have proved to be just words. Perhaps the Minister for Sport should come to the House now to tell us how strongly he feels about the refusal of his partner in the so-called "dream ticket"—the so-called "sporting Prime Minister"—to aid sport in that way. If the Minister of State replies to the debate, I hope that she will answer those points. If one of her colleagues is to reply, I hope that she will pass on those comments.

Perhaps the Minister for Sport would explain to our rugby players, athletes and tennis players why he has failed to deliver the goods that he intimated that he would deliver, and what has happened to the much-trailed national lottery. That proposal appears to have been shelved or buried. In its place, we have a commitment to take £60 million out of football, where it is desperately needed to fund the requirements of Lord Justice Taylor's report, and to give it to some new body, the members of which we do not know, the structure of which is unclear, and on which we have not heard a single assurance from the Government about accountability or the monitoring of decision making or performance.

However, what is clear is that that money will not even all go to sport. Some will go to the arts, which already receives eight times the level of Government funding for sport. Government figures that were given to me only last year in a written answer show that total funding of the arts has risen over the past four years by 43·9 per cent., whereas sport has seen only a 16 per cent. rise in grant to the Sports Council, and has suffered a cut of over a quarter in the amount of money that is given to inner-city sport through the urban programme. Like, I am sure, most of my hon. Friends, I do not wish to see the arts knocked. They should receive a proper level of funding from central Government —and rather more than they receive at present.

What infuriates me, however, and many other sports lovers is that the Government refuse to meet their own responsibilities for supporting the arts but expect an already grossly under-invested industry, which is what football is, to subsidise their own inadequacy and unwillingness. It is like asking Bob Cratchit to pay Scrooge's poll tax, but stranger things have happened under this Government.

We do not even have any guarantees that the new body will see the light of day. As I understand it, the scheme has been concocted as a result of negotiations between the Government and one pools company—the one that has 77 per cent. of the betting turnover. I wonder what has happened to the party that believes in free competition. It has now negotiated a deal that penalises the minority players in this market.

Will the Minister give a clear undertaking tonight that the other two companies involved will be consulted about the structure that is to be set up to dispense their money? I hope that the House will have an opportunity to discuss that structure, because it will be a baffling prospect to many that any organisation will be able to satisfy the demands that will be placed upon it by the sports and arts lobbies.

However, even more damning for sport, and possibly the biggest sting of all, is that the proposals will not lead to net investment or to even a single penny for sport. Many hon. Members will be fascinated by the figures. The Budget will result in a massive subsidy from sport to the Chancellor, not the other way round. Even if sport was to get all the money going from the Government to the new foundation, it would still receive only £20 million, not in direct grants but in Government revenue from the football pools betting duty.

The Royal Commission on Gambling said in 1978 that the rate of 40 per cent. on football pools betting duty was too high and recommended that it be cut to 37 per cent., and that the money should be ploughed back into football. That recommendation came long before Lord Justice Taylor's report was envisaged. How much more desperately does football need the money now, never mind the needs of sport in general?

When one considers the effect of increased VAT and excise duties, the figure of £20 million is dwarfed by the amount of hard cash that will come to the Government from sport. A Sports Council official confirmed to me that the effect of increased VAT on its own will mean that our sportsmen and women will cough up—through, for example, increased charges for equipment and admission fees—a staggering extra £77·5 million at 1985 prices which translates into £105 million in today's prices. That is a net profit to the Government of over £80 million. We could say that the Government's sporting horse has come in at a starting price of 4 to 1. That does not take account of the effect of VAT, increasing charges for voluntary sports clubs of hiring grounds and equipment, or increases in excise duties.

So much for the great dream ticket for sport; so much for the sporting Prime Minister; and so much for the concern of the Minister for Sport about the amount of tax that sport has to pay. The reality is that the Budget is the biggest con for sport in recent history. If the Government were a racehorse, there would be cause for a stewards' inquiry.

Last night, a Conservative Member—I will not name him, for obvious reasons—told me that he was ashamed of being a Tory. It is a bad Budget. It is designed to save the Tories' own neck rather than to build the country's future. The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard), had a rough time this morning, as we have heard. The Gravesend constituency is considered the most representative in the country. She must have got a clear message from the audience that they recognised that it is a bad Budget which will fail them. She is probably still bruised from that exercise.

The Government began their life by increasing VAT. They will surely finish their life in the same fashion.

8.32 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I will not follow the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) down the sporting route, although he knows that I follow the affairs of the football world with keen interest. Nor will I follow hon. Members who have discussed at length the effect of the Budget on the community charge, because that matter will be addressed tomorrow, probably in a statement. Remarks on that should be seen in their entirety, when we know how the community charge is to be altered.

There is no doubt that we have had a Budget for business because of the changes to the VAT regulations and rates, and also because of the changes in corporation tax. Business will also welcome the proposals for consultation about high street share shops. If we can persuade people to purchase shares in the high street from retailers, who may or not be banks or financial institutions but who will be much more accessible than the average stockbroker, that is an exciting prospect, if only because it holds out the opportunity of reducing transaction costs for share purchase. Transaction costs are one of the major obstacles to people buying shares. With the delay of the TAURUS system—transfer and automated registration of uncertificated stock—to 1992 in the London stock exchange, every effort should be made to ensure that transaction costs are kept to a minimum.

Having high street share shops to cover the primary market in shares may not be enough. They should also cover the secondary market, so that people could sell their shares as well as buy them in those shops. If the shops are to work in that context, consideration must be given to the operation of the secondary market in shares in the London stock exchange and the spread between bid and offer prices.

The principal item in the Budget which will be welcomed by business is the projection of Treasury economists, confirming the projection of other economists in the London market, that the inflation rate should be down to about 4 per cent. by the final quarter of the year. That would be a dramatic reduction and a great improvement on previous inflation projections. I believe that it will presage a tumbling of interest rates which will be extremely advantageous to business, large and small.

Interest rates have hit business and home owners badly. Businesses have also suffered because of the uniform business rate. In conjunction with the changes to the community charge, I hope that attention will be given to the effect of the uniform business rate on businesses in London and the south-east. It has by no means been beneficial, although there are undoubtedly major advantages to it.

There are dangers in low interest rates. If interest rates come down rapidly—I believe that they will, in a way which is sustainable within ERM constraints—the risk is that the property market will take off again, and that we will suffer another house price boom. The last property boom contributed to our troubles of high inflation and too much consumer spending because of leakage from the property market to the consumer market. As a result, interest rates had to be raised. We need to be cautious about how rapidly and how far interest rates drop because of the effect on the housing market.

I welcome the Government's decision to remove mortgage interest relief for higher rate taxpayers. That will be at least a constraint on the property market taking off again, although the benefits that such mortgage holders gained was by no means as great as other tax benefits from investing in their principal home. The major benefit is capital gains tax relief. Investment in principal homes rather than in other parts of the economy has led to a major distortion of the investment market. While it is not necessarily more beneficial to the economy to have investment in other areas rather than in bricks and mortar, it would be nice to get a better balance between property and other sectors of the economy.

As interest rates come down, and as people start to borrow, there will be calls from the Labour party, especially from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and from the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), for the institution of credit controls. Of course, credit controls are nonsense now and would be nonsense in future. There is no possibility of them working without the reintroduction of exchange controls. If the Labour party ever formed a Government and structured a Budget, it would introduce exchange controls to stop leakage, because in no other way could it introduce credit controls.

Labour Members talk also about compensating balances and reserve asset ratios for banks. But those are merely other means of jacking up interest rates. If one wishes to constrain the way in which banks lend, it is much better to do it through interest rates than by phoney ratios which have no other effect than indirectly to affect interest rates. They certainly have no effect of shaking off borrowing, other than through the indirect pressure on interest rates which they produce.

The danger we face is incidental to our membership of the exchange rate mechanism. It is important that we consider moving rapidly towards entering the narrow band of the ERM, because that constraint will be important to us. At present, we suffer in the ERM from the fact that the deutschmark is—or has been—extremely strong. There are now clear signs from the German economy that the deutschmark is about to enter a phase of structural weakness, if only because of the high cost of reconstructing eastern Germany and the consequential large budget deficits that the German economy will run. They will be offset partly by higher interest rates and a rise in German domestic taxation, but the result will almost certainly be a weakening of the deutschmark.

The consequence of a weaker deutschmark may also be that the pound will start to rise to the top end of the band in the ERM, forcing us to reduce interest rates more rapidly—indeed, to a lower level than we would otherwise have wished. In itself, that may have inflationary consequences in Britain, because, if nothing else, property prices would be stoked up.

The way to get around that within the mechanism of the ERM is to recognise that we must be either in the ERM or out of it. As we have decided to be in it, we ought to be in it entirely. We should ensure that the ERM is altered in such a way that there is a common interest rate and foreign exchange policy across European Community countries and control of the different reactions of currencies within the ERM. That would mean that we would not be forced to adjust for domestic German policy by changing our own interest rate policy. That can be done only if we enter the narrow band of the ERM and move fairly rapidly to

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

some form of Eurofed or central bank in the EC. That is important, because the only alternative is to come out of the ERM altogether.

The Budget will benefit business. If for no other reason than the fall in interest rates, we shall start to see business take off again, and we shall begin to come out of the recession later this year. That will be welcome and will set us back on the path of growth and economic strength which will be the foundation for great prosperity. As I and all my hon. Friends believe, that will lead us forth to a successful general election campaign when it comes.

8.42 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): I have considered most of the comments made by the economic analysts in the press and other areas of information provision and concluded, after the most careful thought, that the Budget was a dog's breakfast. It does not meet, even in the slightest way, the problems of the country.

I do not have to call on Labour party opinion and policy or, indeed, any platform to underwrite what I have just said. I call in aid the report issued on 14 March of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, in another place. It said that the policies of the present Government include no commitment to industry. It is a Committee on which Conservatives are in the majority. After careful consideration and after examining witness after witness, the Committee's report said that, if the present policies were persisted with, Britain would not have any British-owned manufacturing industries. That is the risk. It also said that the Government had no strategy for industry and no policy that took into account the national interest.

This piddling little thing called the Budget—we had the usual ritual of the walk in the park before the Chancellor arrived here, and the little red box, which has more said about it than was in it—was a bit of a dog's breakfast. I call in aid another factor. In the House this afternoon, I raised a matter which is current. The calamitous news in Barrow-in-Furness will cripple the economy of that populace. I raised another matter this afternoon which is causing great concern. The Minister's answer was not much. He told me that he intended to talk to the Commissioner, Leon Brittan. I know that they deserve each other. Ministers made so much of the meeting. One might ask the Commissioner, who is a British subject, whose side he is on. I asked a question arising from *Lloyd's List* of 3 March, which said that there had been a calamitous decline in shipbuilding in the United Kingdom —of 80 per cent. in 10 years. Britain, which had the most magnificent shipbuilding industry in the world has experienced an 80 per cent. reduction of what was left 10 years ago. The newspaper added that Denmark, Germany and Italy have increased their share of world shipbuilding orders while Britain's share has shrunk to 0·77 per cent.

I feel a little ashamed. When I was a young lad, my father used to tell me about Britain. When I grew up, I began to learn about British-made. It was better than a handshake and a good deal done. Our word was our bond. What do we have now? We have not only a shipbuilding industry which is almost non-existent but a mere 0·77 per cent. share of world orders. There must be a state of madness in Government Departments to allow our great country's major industries to be in a state of decline.

Another matter which the Budget statement did not touch on was the closed Ravenscraig steelworks. Thousands of people have lost their jobs. One must apply a multiplier to the immediate unemployment created. If 2,000 jobs are lost at a factory, the multiplier, which is never less than two, makes it a loss of 4,000 jobs in the area. What a disgusting, messy nonsense it is that Black Bob—he got his name well enough as chairman of British Steel—says that he does not intend to allow anyone to buy the works to compete with him. As in the case of shipbuilding, the British steel industry, which once accounted for 20 per cent. of steel making in the whole of Europe, has now been reduced to a size that does not reflect the significance that it once enjoyed.

Did the Budget include any reference to the dilemma faced by people who want to save communities in the coal industry? Not very long ago we were producing 75 million tonnes of coal for the power programme. The figure is now 60 million tonnes. There is now talk of coal being imported from abroad—cheap coal extracted by cheap labour. Indeed, the privatised electricity industry is buying coal mines abroad. Is there something wrong with that? Of course there is. It stinks. When I go abroad I want to speak well of my country; I do not want to be reminded that the major pillars of our industrial economy have been knocked down.

The best economists and chancellors in the world are the housewives. The Conservative party need not think for one moment that what it is doing about the poll tax will get it anywhere. The housewife will ask, "What is it that is a charge on my domestic budget but is not being taken into account by the House of Commons?" We hear a great deal of impressive economic jargon. Hon. Members enhance their self-importance by referring to such things as the ERM. The ERM is just another name for the fixed rate. We all know the history of fixed rates in this country. The housewife, when she is talking to her husband about the week's budget, will say, "The new financial year is starting. We have been told that the price of electricity is going to rise by more than 17 per cent., and that we shall have to pay more than 12 per cent. more for water. We have been told that fares are about to go up, and that we are going to have to pay more for food and household goods. You will have to pay more for the petrol that you use travelling to work." The list goes on and on. The housewife will say, "How are we going to meet these extra costs? Those daft Members of Parliament tell us not to make wage demands, because they want to get inflation under control." Members of Parliament and other people who are well off do not have to ask how they will manage to meet the extra costs.

What of the poll tax? I chaired the Standing Committee that dealt with the poll tax legislation. Every member of that Committee expressed concern. What a stupid idea it is to try to tax at local level people who are always on the move. What an awful proposition. But now, having said time and time again over the past two years that the poll tax would work, the Government, in a panic, are doing something about it. The Ribble Valley by-election hit them on the head, and they said, "My god, we can't win an election. We had better get rid of the poll tax." So they put the extra burden on VAT.

I have news for the Government. Value added tax—and I am talking not about zero-rated goods—represents a higher proportion of limited incomes than of higher incomes, and is therefore a regressive tax. People on family income support who are under the threshold do not have to pay poll tax, but even they—people with less than £50 a week to play with—will have to pay an extra 2·5 per cent. in VAT. It does not make sense. For those without money in their pocket, life is going to be hard.

As other hon. Members have waited a long time for the opportunity to speak, I intend to say very little more, but there is one more point that I want to make. Irrespective of whether we like it, Members of Parliament have to make political judgments. There is great concern about how to get the best response from the electorate. Sometimes we make the mistake of making promises—offering carrots. I can tell the House that the electorate will respond favourably if they see consistency of principle, if they see in Members of Parliament examples of public service. They will vote for candidates whose behaviour demonstrates that they are concerned about people. They will not be fooled by carrots—offers of concessions—in the hope that they will deliver their votes in a few weeks' or a few months' time. The public are bigger and better than that. This is Britain. There are higher standards and better examples to be found out there than in here. That had better be understood. Otherwise, something else might be at risk—democracy itself.

8.57 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) has just made a stirring speech on behalf of the Opposition. I say to the hon. Gentleman, and to the many people who criticise the Budget from an expenditure point of view, that when the economy is not at its strongest money has to be earned. Industry has to prosper before money can be spent. That fact must be taken into account. Many of the industries to which the hon. Gentleman referred have changed in nature. They have become far more productive; with advancing technology, there is a smaller manual element. Thus, there are fewer jobs.

The most important element of the Budget is the community charge. The public cried out to us for a remedy. Rejection of the tax was widespread. It caused low-income and middle-income families a great deal of difficulty. It eroded the disposable income of many people and the situation had to be rectified. In introducing an extremely bold policy my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has addressed the problem. The community charge will be reduced by £140 a head for every payer. It is a sensible measure that will be greeted by the majority of the British people as a common sense move. My right hon. Friend has chosen to raise the money to meet the reduction in the community charge by increasing value added tax by 2·5 per cent. I have listened to the complaints about that, but the reduction of the community charge means that the average family will save £280 a year. That family will have to spend at least £11,000 a year on goods and services that attract VAT before it is worse off. That puts the issue in context.

What are the main essentials for a family? When we answer that question we take into consideration items that are zero-rated, such as children's clothes and shoes, fuel for heating and housing costs. Those are essential items that form the basis of the bills that face every family. As they do not attract VAT, it is clear that the majority of families, including pensioners, single parents and those who are unemployed, will be better off as a consequence of the policy that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has produced.

I say in a jocular sense that I look forward to the other half of the Budget, as I see it, which will be introduced tomorrow afternoon when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment tells us exactly what he plans to do in the long term. Many of us appreciate that that will lead to the abolition of the community charge.

It is important to understand that we are discussing a Budget for business. Certain factors are not understood by Opposition Members. I listened with interest to the members of the Opposition's team of polytechnic lecturers who speak from the Opposition Front Bench on Department of Trade and Industry matters. They tell us how we should run the economy, but they have never had to worry about where wages come from, about the cash flow of a company or how they will ensure that their workers have training and expertise. These Front-Bench Opposition spokesmen have no experience of those matters. I am a barrister, the chairman of one company and the director of another, and I have relevant experience, as do my colleagues who sit on the Government Front Bench.

There will be cuts in corporation tax and additional help with bad debts. The cost of those measures will total £570 million. That sum will find its way into long-term investment, including the creation of new jobs that will be available when we see the upturn in the economy, which I am sure will come.

We cannot ignore the small business element. The Budget will lead to changes in the collection of tax and to national insurance relief. It will raise the limit of VAT registration to £35,000. The submission of small business accounts will be by way of statement when there is a turnover of only £10,000. These are major improvements that will be greeted with enthusiasm by those who run small businesses. They will work their way through in economic activity and job creation throughout the country. The theme that is forgotten is the overall downward thrust on inflation which in the next few months will lead to a reduction in interest rates. The present level of those rates is the major complaint of every business throughout the country and their reduction is the key to our future prosperity.

We took a bold decision to go into the exchange rate mechanism. It seems clear that the decision made on the value of sterling when we entered the mechanism will be sustained. That in itself will bring a downward pressure on interest rates. Who else will benefit from a reduction in interest rates? The answer is the 65 per cent. of British people who own their own houses and who pay mortgages. A reduction in interest rates will put more money into their pockets. That will lead to their having a greater disposable income and that benefit will work its way back into the economy.

Another important element is the green policy contained within the Budget. I make no apology to those who complain that the price of cigarettes will be increased. How much money do we spend on the national health service year on year to enable it to deal with

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

smoking-related diseases? The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) laughs, but we are spending millions of pounds on cancer research and treating people for heart disease within the NHS, much of which is related to the amount of smoking that takes place in society. We all received a letter from Action on Smoking and Health last week. That organisation is concerned about the increasing numbers of young girls at school and of married mothers at home who are smoking. An increase in the duty on cigarettes will be a major deterrent that will lead to an improvement in the health of the nation.

The same can be said of alcohol. Drinks that contain high levels of alcohol will bear the greatest amount of duty. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has rightfully decided that low-alcohol beers should attract a smaller amount of duty.

We have a major problem with the greenhouse effect, so we are encouraging lean-burn engines. It will cost more for petrol, but the encouragement is for lean-burn, smaller engines for the future. It is not without significance that, overall, Britain has the lead in lean-burn technology. As time goes on we shall probably benefit from that; the cars of the future will have smaller engines and will consume less petrol.

Although I believe that child allowances in tax terms should be the way to target money at the most needy, I know that the increase in child benefit will be greatly appreciated by the vast majority of families.

This is a diverse Budget which deals with a good many difficulties. It is imaginative and it attacks the major problems that face us today. I have no doubt that it will be greeted warmly by the vast majority of people.

9.5 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a highly intelligent and socially sensitive Budget. I also congratulate the Chief Secretary on his typically meaty contribution to the debate, and remark in parentheses that the broadcasting authorities and interests who have good reason to be grateful to him for his sensible and enlightened conduct of the Broadcasting Bill are lucky to have someone in the Treasury who will be sensitive to their concerns when these matters raise their heads again.

My main point concerns something that other hon. Members—I apologise for my temporary absence earlier this evening—have not addressed: housing. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in deciding to reduce the 40 per cent. mortgage tax relief to a flat rate of 25 per cent. for everyone, mentioned his desire to avoid another upsurge in the housing market.

We are in a curious situation in the House when it comes to housing. Whatever subject one may care to take, hon. Members on one side or the other, Labour, Liberal Democrats or ourselves, will tell the public the truth about the situation. It is all too rare for this to happen with housing, particularly with mortgage tax relief. Nothing should be taboo for discussion in the House, yet somehow we all know that there is something fundamentally, culturally wrong with housing finance. If one were to lock the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders in a room for half an hour and tell them that they must agree on one thing that would benefit the economy of the country in the longer term, however controversial it might be politically, they would all come out with the same answer: the total abolition of mortgage tax relief.

Let us not forget that this problem has a history. It is not so much a cultural history, it is a cult of house ownership. When the Government talk about encouraging further house ownership, it may be electorally appealing in the immediate future but it is also financially and economically damaging. How far do we want to go? We have nearly 70 per cent. house ownership now. Do we want 100 per cent. house ownership with all the immobility of labour that it implies? Have we spared a glance for the position in some other countriess, the economies of which tend to be in better shape than ours and where there is a healthier mixture of ownership, rental and state provision? It seems that there is something wrong and unhealthy with the state towards which we are heading, with 70 per cent. house ownership and beyond, because so much of that is based on state subsidy. It is no good arguing that the £30,000 tax relief limit is withering away, when the actual cost to the Treasury is going up by leaps and bounds. It has gone up by about 50 per cent. during the past few years and now stands at £8 billion. With my own little interest in education, I note that that is precisely the same sum as the cost of teachers' salaries—an interesting little side point.

The enormous figure of £8 billion which is coughed up by the Treasury does not help people to gain their houses or help first-time buyers, but, as everyone outside the House knows and says, it inflates the price of houses. The result in my constituency, which is rural, is that people born in villages cannot afford to buy houses in them. It is important for the subject to be debated honestly in the House. I understand perfectly well why the Government find it difficult to be as frank as they might be inclined to be on the subject, and I am tempted to say that I understand why the Opposition are a little reticent. However, it is important for us to confront the public with the realities of the inflated cost of housing.

One of the many distortions to which this state leads is in the private rented market. The Government have rightly introduced legislation to liberalise the private rented market, but no one in his right mind will rent a house if he can receive Government subsidy, in the shape of mortgage tax relief, to buy one. That is one reason why the private rented market has not taken off and remains at the stultified and completely artificial level of about 9 or 10 per cent., despite the Government's best efforts to improve it.

We could develop the subject ad nauseam. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has said that the existence of mortgage tax relief in the British culture of house ownership distorts the relationship between productive and non-productive investment—in bricks and mortar, money under the floorboards—to an enormous degree. It distorts the mentality of people's financial planning. Extraordinary figures show that the average mortgage indebtedness of individuals in this country is about double that of analogous countries. The culture of house ownership distorts our wage-claim philosphy. As soon as interest rates go up after a housing boom, people feel that they are entitled to ask for a wage rise to compensate them because their financial philosophy is based on mortgage tax relief and the extent to which they have got themselves artificially indebted because of their mortgage commitments.

This is a fundamental problem in the British economy which, uniquely, cannot be frankly discussed by the Government or the Opposition and so is rarely talked about in this place. However, every responsible economist outside the House and every major, quality newspaper, including *The Times* this morning—which asked why the Chancellor of the Exchequer had not done away with the whole damned thing while he was about it—agrees that this is a pernicious system that is damaging to the British economy, housing interests in general and home buyers.

There are paradoxes here. I recognise all the politial problems of doing away with mortgage tax relief. They are common to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We all understand the difficulties of presentation to the public. But if mortgage tax relief were done away with, the first thing that would happen would be that house prices generally would fall. In my personal estimation, they would fall by more than the tax relief in question. It is exactly like going to Harrods or any other shop during the sale—people tend to buy things that they do not need. In just the same way, the very existence of mortgage tax relief encourages people to pay more for their houses than they should.

The paradox—it is an important economic paradox—is that if mortgage tax relief were done away with or phased out, house prices would be reduced by more than the tax relief is worth. The result of that—this is the important point—would be that people's mortgages would be less than they are at present.

Since I am making a bit of a virtue of being honest, let us be honest about the repercussions of that. The general level of house prices would stagnate or perhaps even subside. Therefore, people's sense of what they owned in terms of capital might stagnate or subside. But we must be frank and honest about that. Is it a good thing for Britain's future economy that people should have a permanently inflated sense of the value of their property? I rather doubt whether that is so. In this, as in other elements of the Government's policy over the past 10 years, realism and honesty are probably the best policy, particularly in terms of Conservative philosophy. We cannot say that our philosophy in economic matters is based on choice and at the same time say that the be-all and end-all of a person's economic existence is house ownership. There is a fundamental contradiction there.

Economic choice in the housing market means a choice between buying and renting. It is as simple as that. But the market is skewed by the fact that we spend £8 billion a year —I repeat, the total cost of teachers' salaries—propping up artificial prices in the housing market. Our philosophy is skewed and contradictory and, while that goes on the private rented market in Britain will never take off in the way that the country needs, both to expand that stunted market and to create a level playing field in housing terms.

We are all grown-up people and no one, other than misguided individuals such as myself, talks about such matters before an election. But this is a fundamental problem which will not go away. That is why I am taking this opportunity to make some remarks that will be highly unpopular among many people in the country and which will marginally embarrass members of the Government Front Bench, except that they know that what I say is true and that the remedies that I advocate are the right ones. I suspect that the Opposition know that perfectly well, too.

I conclude with the perhaps slightly excessive remark that the continued existence of mortgage tax relief, which inflates prices, distorts the economy and contributes indirectly to the appalling problem of homelessness, is to some extent due to a conspiracy of silence in the House among all political parties. However, I have enough residual political realism to realise that nothing will be said or done about the problem this side of an election.

9.19 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): On the eve of the Chancellor's statement, the country looked to him for a Budget for manufacturing industry, for training and employment, for mother and child, for sustained and sustainable investment, and for growth and recovery within a decent environment.

Yesterday, the House and the country got a Budget born out of desperation and rooted in failure. The desperation prompted a squalid political bribe of unsurpassed proportions to be delivered, in an unprecedented fashion on the back of an unparalleled transfer from local to central taxation, by a substantial addition to the rate of value added tax. The failure was a failure in the economy.

In his opening remarks, the Chancellor paid a somewhat surprising, but nevertheless heartfelt, tribute to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). In so doing, he invited a comparison between the right hon. Member and himself that I think the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will well understand—a comparison in performance. I shall try to explain it. I said that I believed that the Chief Secretary would understand it because the English National Opera company—of which I am director—has a reason to be thankful to him in another incarnation and I know that he is a great lover of the lyric verse.

The best way to describe the performance of the right hon. Member for Blaby on these occasions used to be "bravura". The performance of the Chancellor was much more "sotto voce", more of an Italianate tenor—a lightweight Figaro. That is how I would describe him, as a deft but lightweight Figaro whose bits of business—we all know what a great one Figaro was for bits of business —were not designed simply to enhance one's understanding of the piece, although it must be said that they were ingenious bits of business and brought cheer to some of the audience who feared that they might otherwise lose their seats. Nor were his bits of business even designed to take the action forward, which is always a good excuse for a bit of business in opera. No, on this occasion they were designed to keep the set from falling down on the heads of the players.

That was the point of all of those ingenious little steps, although some were large, histrionic steps—consider the hike in the rate of VAT. We shall remember that performance. However, the failure is a serious matter.

Mr. Mellor: What about Brunhilde?

Mr. Boateng: No, Brunhilde is in the past. She has had her day and has been disposed of in the most unpleasant and Wagnerian fashion. The Chief Secretary must not be naughty, although his role in those matters is suspected, if not known. I want us to consider the failure that necessitated the bits of business. One hundred business failures, 4,000 job losses and 150 house repossessions every working day: that is the extent of the failure. The CBI's

[Mr. Boateng]

optimism indicator—an interesting criterion by which to judge a Conservative Government—is at its lowest since 1980, at minus 51 per cent.

Moreover, we must not forget the figures that the Chancellor left out yesterday. Fixed investment, predicted last year to fall by 1 per cent., is now predicted to fall by 10 per cent. Manufacturing output, predicted last year to fall by 1 per cent., is now predicted to fall by 5 per cent.

What we encountered was a phenomenon to which Opposition Members have grown accustomed. We encountered it last year with the former Chancellor, the present Prime Minister; even the right hon. Member for Blaby was given to using this simple device from time to time when he had cause to do so. The device to which I refer is best illustrated by a comparison with a certain cynical, indolent servant of the state—a figure whom the Chancellor, whose love of the cinema is well known, is bound to recognise. Hon. Members will remember the part played by Claude Rains in the movie "Casablanca". Whenever things got out of control and he—through his own indolence or unwillingness—was not able to put them right, he would latch on to the device of rounding up the usual suspects. "Round up the usual suspects!", he would say, and a few tattered figures would be drawn from the casbah.

Hon. Members will remember the scene. Time and time again, throughout the movie, the same thing happened —and that is what has happened in successive Budget speeches over the years. Who, then, are the suspects? It seems that the basic cause of the problem is the same everywhere. We hear of cyclical influences, global phenomena and—I think that this is the best of all—recession, the inescapable feature of the market economy. That is rich, coming from a party that has told us year in, year out, to worship at the feet of this Moloch. "Round up the usual suspects!"

I was a little worried by the fact that, this year, the usual suspects appeared to be pretty thin on the ground. I see the Chancellor craning his neck to see what is coming next. After a while, of course, all the suspects disappear; they are not so obliging in coming forward. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and aficionados of late-night debate will recall his contribution last year, when he was, if memory serves me right, Financial Secretary to the Treasury. It was a startling contribution. This year, however, he was clearly a little concerned that the usual suspects would not be readily to hand. From an article in the *Financial Times* of Monday 11 March—and a good read it was——

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I remember it well.

Mr. Boateng: —we were to discover a new batch of "usual suspects": highly unusual suspects, in view of the Conservative party's composition and policy. We were told that our problems arose because

"we have an over-developed finance function, vis-a-vis the production function."

We could have told him that. Indeed, the last time I saw that phrase used was in the *New Left Review*. The correspondent with the *Financial Times* felt obliged to point that out.—*[Interruption.]* I see that the Minister of State, Treasury read the same letter as I did.

Why should we be surprised that those views have been espoused? After all, the Conservative party chairman felt it necessary to refer to the interesting concept of the social market economy in no less a publication than *Marxism Today*. If that is the vehicle of the chairman of the Conservative party, why should not the *New Left Review* be something from which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry culls his new ideas?

He went on to say—this is where the "usual suspects" appear—that

"We have 120,000 accountants compared with 7,000 in Germany. The inevitable thing in a company dominated by financial people is an excessive preoccupation with succeeding in making deals rather than the predilection of the production manager and the engineer to proceed by organic growth."

We now have a new batch of "usual suspects"—accountants. If there is a profession more populous among the new breed of Conservative Members than estate agents, it is accountants. In their desperation, the Government have turned on the accountants. However, I do not want us to become too hung up on the accountants. We should look at what the engineers have said about the Budget.

Mr. Walden *rose*——

Mr. Boateng: I shall give way later.

The Chief Secretary trotted out a series of favourable reviews. However, he overlooked the review by Ian Thompson of the Engineering Employers Federation—an engineer. That will please the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry because he is not yet among the "usual suspects". That review said that the Budget was

"not an adequate response to the problems of United Kingdom industry and does not address the problems of companies not having enough cash to invest for the future."

That was the judgment of the engineers. This afternoon, we heard the judgment of the accountants, and we all know where they stand on the issue. We must look to Mr. Thompson and the Engineering Employers Federation to find the true reflection of the Budget's worth.

Concern has been expressed by many hon. Members about the belief that the engineering and manufacturing industries were not getting the deal that they deserved from the Budget. The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) rightly said that he believed that the Government might have difficulty in making stick the view that this was a Budget for business. At least he was frank. The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) was less frank. He said that there is no doubt that it is a Budget for business. There was an ambivalence on the part of Conservative Members, and with good cause, because the Budget does not meet—as we would have it meet—the deep-seated needs of the British economy.

In the Budget statement and the Red Book which supports it we find a number of unlikely assumptions and false forecasts that lead us to believe that the Budget is about electoral considerations and short-term political advantage rather than about meeting the immediate needs of our economy.

The Chancellor said in his Budget statement:

"If I may confess it, I do not believe in miracles".—*[Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188 c. 166.]

Remember the economic miracle to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had cause to refer time and again? It is an albatross around the Government's neck. We are told that the Chancellor does not believe in miracles, yet we are asked

to believe in a Budget that is constructed around a number of assumptions whose plausibility looks dubious even now and will look increasingly dubious in future. The Budget deficit of £8 billion must be delivered without spending cuts in the next autumn statement. Inflation must fall to 4 per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1991, and interest rates must fall dramatically. All that must be achieved within the ERM and in an uncertain world.

If we are to achieve 2 per cent. growth between this summer and next, interest rates will have to fall and stay down. The United States economy will have to recover and drive world growth. United Kingdom companies will have to disavow reductions in investment, jobs and stocks. Will that happen? Will the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) take a vow of silence? Will the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who has gone off in a huff, suddenly convert to the command economy? Will it happen? Will it hell.

Mr. Walden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: I promise that we shall hear the apologia for the accountants in due course.

We can therefore be forgiven for being somewhat sceptical about the assumptions that lie behind the Budget.

Mr. Walden: The hon. Gentleman's speech is more entertaining than enlightening. Why does he not recognise that three of his favourite foxes—child benefit, mortgage interest tax relief and the community charge—have been shot, leaving him bugling away to the empty air? Will he now tell us exactly what he would do?

Mr. Boateng: I do not have a favourite fox, but those among my acquaintances are very fit and will yet outrun Conservative Members.

In the moments that remain to me, however, let me seize with both hands the opportunity to examine what we believe needs to be done. We have outlined it clearly enough, but I am only too happy to reiterate it. We believe that it is important that the Government should reverse the cuts that they have made in employment training and youth training. We are disappointed that all we had from them was the paltry £20 million-worth of allowances. [HON. MEMBERS: "Paltry?"] Yes, it is paltry when compared with the £245 million that the Government have cut from the youth training and employment training budgets. That cut should be reversed. We believe that there should be a temporary work programme for the long-term unemployed and we have called for a specific programme to achieve that.

We believe that, in regard to child care and support for children and mothers, the proposals in the Budget about child benefit are completely inadequate. Child benefit should have been increased to £9·55 a week for all children and we entirely accept the point made most cogently by the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). It makes no sense to distinguish between the first child and any subsequent children. This year, a two-child family will lose £154·70 as a result of the Government's failure to upgrade child benefit.

We believe that more should have been done in relation to the environment. To describe what the Government have done as a green tinge is a misuse of language. The Government had an opportunity, which they failed to take, to begin to create conditions that would have a real impact on the misuse of the car through the use of differential VAT and differential vehicle excise licensing, but they failed to take that opportunity.

We believe that it is important to emphasis research and development and to use capital allowances imaginatively and progressively to achieve that end. That was the call made by the Confederation of British Industry and by the engineers.

The Budget is a wasted opportunity. The Government have failed the country and they have failed to meet the challenge of the times. In due course, they will pay the price of that failure.

9.41 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): This has been an enjoyable debate. It is some time since I had the pleasure of taking part in a Budget debate and this has been a spirited and delightful day. I very much enjoyed the speech made by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). It was strong on style although a bit short on content. It was good on opera and films, but a little light on economics. It may be a pedestrian view, but I believe that a debate on the Budget should at least touch lightly on economics at some point. None the less, the hon. Member for Brent, South made a very good speech and we all enjoyed it.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not been with us in the Chamber for much of this debate. However, I suspect that his ears were burning as a result of the large number of compliments that were paid to his Budget. I will spare his blushes by not listing all the plaudits.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Go on, list some.

Mr. Maude: Very well, I will. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) described the Budget as civilised and intelligent. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends used other adjectives. Very few of my right hon. and hon. Friends found anything to cavil at in the Budget. It was slightly disappointing that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) chose to describe it as a dog's breakfast. If that is right, it is some dog and it must be a very filling and nutritious breakfast.

To paraphrase my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), he pleaded that we should be nice to manufacturing industry. I believe and hope that we are. Perhaps I can say something nice about one particular part of manufacturing industry which has been the subject of much comment—the car industry. The car industry did astonishingly well during the past year—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may laugh, but it is an important matter. They may like to listen. In the past three months motor vehicle exports from this country rose by 50 per cent. over the equivalent period a year before. Opposition Members may think that that is funny, but we think that it is to be commended.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Is it not a credit to the fact that Britain has been prepared to invite inward investment from Nissan, Toyota and so on? People are building cars in this country and exporting them to the European Community, and that plays a major part in closing the trade deficit with which we are currently wrestling.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the large amounts of investment coming into this country. Despite Opposition Members' efforts to talk it down, this country is now a rather good place in which to manufacture goods, as people outside the Labour party increasingly recognise.

I shall deal briefly with the speech of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The main burden of his song seemed to be that we should hand over control of monetary policy to an independent central bank. That demonstrates in an aspirant Chancellor of the Exchequer a certain lack of confidence in his ability to control monetary policy. If there were ever the prospect of his being Chancellor of the Exchequer, the attractions of having an independent central bank might become rather more apparent.

Mr. Beith: It was the view of the previous Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). Was he dissatisfied with his capacity to run monetary policy?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman wants to hand over control first to the Bank of England and then to a European central bank. I am bound to say that that view does not command much support on this side of the House.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) referred, as did my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, to the erratic nature of some forecasts. The hon. Gentleman expressed a strong preference for private sector rather than public sector forecasts. That represents a damascene conversion to the merits of the private sector which is wholeheartedly to be welcomed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), who also spoke in complimentary terms about my right hon. Friend's Budget, rightly emphasised the importance of getting inflation down. That is the major theme of the Budget and of the debate. Unless we get inflation down we cannot build for growth and prosperity in the future.

Several hon. Members talked about local government, and properly so because it featured in my right hon. Friend's Budget statement. I must ask them to contain their impatience until tomorrow, in particular the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), who asked several specific points. Those points will be dealt with in due course, but I must ask the hon. Gentleman to contain his proper inquisitiveness until then.

In the Budget there are several tax reform issues which take forward the Government's firm commitment steadily to reform the tax system where necessary. There is a consultation document on foreign exchange gains and losses—not, I accept, a glamorous subject, but it is important—in which we present proposals that we believe will bring rationality to a difficult aspect of the tax code. We have also presented a consultative document on resident trusts. That is the outcome of a review that was announced by my right hon. Friend when he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Again, that document would rationalise the law in a way that will simplify it and make it more comprehensive and helpful. We proposed to bring forward a consultative paper on taxation of the self-employed. The present arrangements for taxing companies and the self-employed are complicated and inefficient.

We are already introducing a new system, "Pay and File", which will simplify the way in which companies pay tax. It is now time to streamline the arrangements for the self-employed. We propose changing one of the oddest features of the present system which is that in any year the self-employed are taxed on their profits in the preceding year. Under the new proposals, the self-employed would, like employed people or companies, pay tax for one year on the profits earned in that year. We believe that that would help to make the rules much simpler. We also have proposals to cut the regulation of the self-employed by the Inland Revenue, by giving the self-employed greater responsibility for settling their own tax, as happens in other countries. It will not be possible to implement the reforms for some years, but, if we are to take full advantage of the opportunity for radical and imaginative reform, we need to start planning for it now.

The Budget contained a number of proposals about deregulation of the tax system. Taxes inevitably place a compliance burden on taxpayers and it may frequently be necessary for businesses to play a role in administering the system to ensure that it is as cost-effective as possible. Periodically, we must look at ways of easing that burden where possible, and must always take into account the compliance costs when considering options for change. Of course, the best deregulatory measures are those that take people out of the tax system altogether. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a 40 per cent. increase in the value added tax threshold. It will mean that up to 150,000 firms will no longer have to register for VAT.

We have also reduced the burden of the tax system on small firms through our proposal to allow up to 700,000 small employers to pay their PAYE and NIC payments quarterly instead of monthly. That will help them by improving their cash flow—although I accept that it will do so only slightly—and by reducing their administrative costs.

Next year we shall increase the number of taxpayers who may submit simplified three-line accounts to the Revenue from 1 million to 1·5 million. Again, that means a substantial reduction in compliance costs for those in business.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) asked yesterday about the proposed tax relief on vocational training and whether it would extend beyond examination fees, and tuition and course fees. The relief is intended to be given at source. Repayment systems always cause delay and confusion, so we propose that tax offices will be involved only in reimbursing organisations that provide qualifying relief and individual taxpayers who are entitled to relief at the higher rate. Because it is relief at source, it is not possible to extend it to travel, subsistence or accommodation costs or to the cost of books or equipment——

Mr. Hill: I observed earlier that it seems unnecessarily harsh that married couples should not have any increase in their tax-free allowance. I was told during the debate that that hinged on child benefit, but I can scarcely believe it. Will my hon. Friend look again at this matter because we are the party of the family, and married couples should receive an increase in that allowance?

Mr. Maude: I am sorry that I missed my hon. Friend's speech. He is right that we do not propose to increase the married couple's allowance this year. My right hon. Friend

the Chancellor decided that the benefit for families should be directed this year at families with children, and especially the first child. I know that that seemed eccentric to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham, but the main cost on a family comes with the arrival of the first child because that is generally when the mother has to stop work and other costs arise. If it is desirable—as we believe that it is—to target help on families with children, almost by definition it is less sensible to give help by way of the married couple's allowance to families without children.

This is a Budget for business. That is not just a slogan; it has been recognised as such by everyone from the business world who has commented on it. It will cut the administrative burden of the tax system and will help the cash flow of businesses.

Mr. Harry Ewing: The Chief Secretary made no reference to expected levels of unemployment. I suspect that the Minister is about to finish his speech without making any reference to them. Within the context of its being a so-called Budget for business, will he comment on the fact that tomorrow morning British Aerospace will announce 3,500 redundancies?

Mr. Maude: Clearly I cannot comment on that, except to say that if it is the case, I regret it. Obviously we all regret any loss of jobs. We have been frank about unemployment. The economy is going through a recession and a difficult time and unemployment is increasing. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said clearly that it will continue to increase for a time, but there is no forecast. There is nothing surprising about that. So far as I am aware, no Chancellor has ever made a forecast of unemployment.

The Budget will release new money for investment—money that would otherwise have been taken by the taxman. There has been a clamour from the Opposition for capital allowances to be changed. They want a return to the 1970s when there were over-generous tax incentives for business investment. It was not necessarily good investment; indeed, it was often the reverse.

The present system allows businesses to decide for themselves how much to invest. Decisions are taken on economic and commercial grounds and are not driven by tax. More generous capital allowances would deliver a subsidy through the tax system. They can make a bad investment look like a good one. They can make investing in expensive machinery look more sensible than employing extra staff, even when commercially the opposite is true.

Changes to capital allowances could distort business decisions in favour of capital against labour. It sounds surprising that the Labour party should want a tax system that favours capital investment rather than employment. It is odd until we look at what happened in the socialist economies of eastern Europe. They, too, thought that investment in capital was an end in itself. We all know what happened there—massive inefficiencies, bloated heavy industries and inflexible economies. Capital investment in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s was running at 38 per cent. of gross national product, double the rate here. Investment is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end to which it is a means is improving business performance and profitability and underpinning economic growth. That is why our approach encourages companies to take investment decisions on business rather than on tax considerations. That must be right.

Following the 1984 reforms, business investment grew dramatically. In the three years to 1989 investment grew by 43 per cent. to reach an all-time high. Despite the recession, business investment remains at historically high levels. When profitability starts to recover next year, companies will be well placed to benefit from the upturn in activity as inflation drops. Therefore, the Budget will encourage further investment—not any old investment just for the sake of it, but worthwhile investment justified on commercial grounds. It will leave businesses with more of their own money to invest as they judge right. It is worth repeating that my right hon. Friend has cut corporation tax for next year by a full 2 per cent. to 33 per cent., the lowest rate of corporation tax in the European Community and among the G7 countries. At the same time companies will be able to carry back trading losses against profits in the previous three years.

All those measures will provide extra money which would have been taken by the taxman and will leave it with the companies for them to invest, if they choose to do so. For all the sneering from the armchair managers in the Opposition, it is clear that those who are running businesses agree with our judgment that the Budget will benefit businesses by removing burdens and by increasing cash flow.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had a good joke about misdeclarations. We all thoroughly enjoyed it. But I suspect that he began to feel uncomfortable with it when his shadow budget came in for some scrutiny. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary asked him some searching questions about it, but he did not give any answers. I was rebuked in a previous debate for not giving way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but if I had time I would willingly give him an opportunity to set the record straight so that we could know the answers.

The shadow budget that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East set out is the greatest case of a serious misdeclaration that I have ever come across. Either the figures are simply wrong and he would not raise anything like the money that he claimed from his measures, or he is short-changing people either by robbing those who have already received benefits of those benefits or by keeping the benefits of children——

Debate adjourned—[Mr. Boswell.]

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The spectacle of the British Ministry of Defence fighting British ex-service men with the same determination it shows to enemies of the country is disgraceful. Nuclear test veterans have been victims of not only radiation but hostility, miscalculation, dogmatism, meanness and complacency by the Ministry of Defence.

Tonight, I want the House, and the MOD, to consider new evidence which supports the claims of nuclear test veterans, but first I want to look at the National Radiological Protection Board's report. This scientific report was scandalously distorted by political presentation. The crucial "Conclusions" page began:

"It is concluded from the study that participation has not had a detectable effect on the participants expectation of life nor their total risk of developing cancer."

Then, almost as an afterthought, it says:

"apart from a possible effect on the risks of developing Multiple Myeloma and Leukaemia".

People died of multiple myeloma and leukaemia.

The report could, and should, have opened with the sentence, "Participation may have caused death from multiple myeloma and leukaemia although not from other cancers." Instead, it opens with a disclaimer and buries in a long paragraph this revealing comment:

"There may well have been small hazards of leukaemia and multiple myeloma associated with participation in the tests".

It is not surprising that, as a result of the detail of the report, the Department of Social Security is now paying pensions for multiple myeloma and leukaemia. Fortunately, it does not have the gall to demand rigid proof of causation, as does the MOD.

Why is the MOD persisting in its harsh interpretation of the report? The Minister must be aware of the supporting evidence for the test veterans' case. Although the Australian Commission was not a full epidemiological study, it concluded:

"Their exposure to radiation in the trial programme has increased the risk of cancer among 'nuclear veterans'".

The Minister must also know that the epidemiological New Zealand study found a fivefold increase in the risk of death from leukaemia among test veterans—a figure comparable with the three-and-a-half times figure found by the NRPB report. The New Zealand study concluded that the relationship was likely to be causal because a similar excess risk was found in the British study. Two distinct studies found additional risk for the veterans. That cannot be dismissed.

The MOD is burying its head and shutting its eyes and its mind to existing evidence. It prefers to wait for the follow-up report from the NRPB, which is not due until 1992, by which time even more veterans will have died without compensation. That is shifty, evasive and deplorable.

I sent the Minister a copy of my speech in advance so that he might be able to respond constructively to what I am about to say. The new evidence was revealed in the excellent Scottish Television programme "Dispatches", researched by Eamonn O'Neill. The programme claimed that, on 28 April 1958, in the Grapple Y test—the second off Christmas island—the megaton nuclear explosion was at a much lower height than the 8,000 ft officially reported. This lower height would have substantially increased the radioactive fallout because a low-level explosion sucks up material that becomes heavily radioactive. Where that material lands, when it falls back to earth, is a matter of life and death. The programme claimed that a violent rainstorm occurred, and radioactive rain poured on to Christmas island, drenching the men, soaking the ground, and polluting the lagoons.

Will the Minister confirm or deny that the explosion was at a low height, that material was sucked up, and that it fell back with the rain on to Christmas island and into the seas around?

It is also claimed that the explosion took place just one and a half miles away from Christmas island, and not at the official distance of five miles. If this is the case, it is even more likely that the island became contaminated. If the Minister says he has no information, I will bring a deputation to see him to support the television claims. They must be investigated and cannot be ignored.

On the crucial question of safety, the Government are on record as claiming that adequate precautions were taken to protect the men. Dosimeters were used to measure individual exposure to radiation, and it is said that no one was at risk, but inferior film was used in those days. It was not sensitive to low doses. It reached only to gamma radiation and not the more dangerous beta radiation. Will the Minister confirm this? I do not mind being interrupted at any stage. The most damaging claim, supported by the NRPB report, is that exposure to internal contamination could not be recorded on the dosimeters.

These are crucial points, because much of the Ministry's safety claim rests on the fact that exposure to gamma radiation was measured, and that it was at a safe level. If there was no measure of beta exposure, or exposure from internal contamination, there can be no valid claim of safety; it has all been a mirage. Nor can there be any confidence in the argument of the NRPB in its report that there was no association between exposure to radiation and excess leukaemia and multiple myeloma. If it knew about only part of the exposure, discussion of the issue is fruitless.

Far more relevant is the following suggestion in the New Zealand report:

"The possibility cannot be excluded that there could have been significant external exposure to neutron radiation or internal exposure due to inhalation or ingestion".

It is also significant that the greatest relative risk of excess leukaemia was suffered by men thought by the MOD not to have been exposed to radiation—by that is meant external gamma radiation. Could those men, who suffered more leukaemias than others, have ingested fatal beta radiation doses unknown to the MOD? Could that have happened because the cloud of radioactive material over Christmas island was washed down by rain and entered the food chain?

Does the Minister know whether the water on Christmas island, used for drinking and washing by the men, was regularly checked for radioactivity? Was the water on the south side of the island, where the men swam and caught fish, checked for radioactivity? Again, the House is entitled to answers.

Despite claims by the MOD that radiation levels found in fish were minimal, evidence was put forward in the television programme that one of the scientists found that

his geiger counter went berserk when checking radioactivity in some of the fish caught off the south-east point of the island.

Much concern and many unanswered questions have emerged from just one well-researched television programme. Are they the tip of the iceberg? That question can be answered only by a judicial inquiry, and I repeat my request for one. The urgent task is compensation for the veterans while they are alive to benefit from it. The United States Congress was persuaded that there could be no certainty that the tests were safe. Its nuclear test veterans were given the benefit of the doubt. No rigid proof of damaging exposure was demanded. American test veterans now get compensation if they develop any one of 15 cancers.

In Britain, only the nuclear industry has moved. In January of this year, as part of a compensation agreement, British Nuclear Fuels plc paid out £150,000 to the widow of a former plant worker who died of leukaemia. What has been the response of the MOD? Officially, nothing but statements that proof is required and that the study must be awaited. In military parlance, the MOD is cowering in its bunker. It is afraid of the truth. However, just yesterday, it was confirmed in a parliamentary reply to me that the Ministry is investigating the merits of a compensation scheme for radiation-linked disease—similar to that operated by BNFL. Let me warn the Minister that, if the scheme does not include the nuclear test veterans, there will be uproar. Will the Minister tell us tonight just what is stirring within the timid body of the MOD?

Our nuclear test veterans deserve compensation to rank with that given elsewhere. They have suffered injustice since the 1950s. Successive Governments have failed to help them. Many of them are dying with great suffering. They, and their widows, feel what I can only describe as a dignified bitterness. It is time for the Government to put an end to this shameful episode in British military history.

I hope I shall not receive a negative response tonight from the Minister. Perhaps he will recall the words of the Prime Minister, praising the dedication and heroism of our men in the Gulf. He should bear it in mind that praise is not enough. What the men need is justice.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. He has, over the years, persistently campaigned for compensation for those personnel who participated in the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme. I applaud him for his diligence and dedication and I also thank him for giving me prior notice of the points that he made in his speech. He is well aware, Mr. Speaker, that the nub of the matter is the need to prove causation—that is, a causal link between participation in the programme and any subsequent illness. I emphasise at the outset that there is no such evidence.

The young men who took part in the test programme are now middle-aged or elderly and, inevitably, will begin to suffer from the sort of illnesses that might befall all of us as we grow older. The fact is that the incidence of cancer in the participants closely matches that in the normal population.

The question of the nuclear test veterans is, as I say, not new and has been discussed in the House at length. The House will recall the considerable discussions that took place on the subject in 1990, when attempts were made to introduce an amendment to the Social Security Bill to permit the payment of compensation to those service men who participated in the test programme and who subsequently contracted various cancers which they attribute to their involvement in the tests. The proposal was, after much debate, rejected.

Considerable concern has been expressed in the House and elsewhere about the nuclear weapons test programme conducted in the south Pacific in the 1950s and the suggestion that those who took part in the tests have now developed illness as a result of their participation. The concern is understandable. The widespread publicity given to the allegations, and the potentially harmful effects to which radiation can give rise, have considerably added to public anxiety and concern. Cancer is a common cause of death in the developed world; indeed some 20 per cent. of deaths can be attributed to the disease. There are, tragically, more than 100,000 cancer-related deaths a year in this country. It has been estimated that some 1,000 of those deaths may be caused by the various natural sources of radiation all round us. Many participants in the test programme, therefore, would by now be suffering from cancer, or would have died, if they had spent their service entirely in this country and never gone to the south Pacific. It is inevitable, however, and in the circumstances understandable, that many who have developed cancer should attribute their illness to the after-effects of the bomb tests.

The nuclear safety standards implemented during the tests bear favourable comparison with the standards in force today. Individuals who were liable to be exposed to radiation were issued with dosimeters to record the radiation experienced. The safety regulations in force were consistent with recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection and advice from the Medical Research Council. The Government have confirmed that safety precautions were properly monitored and stringently implemented.

While the Government have remained confident over the years that the safety precautions were adequate and that participants were not subjected to any significant health hazards, they have been anxious to alleviate their fears. Bearing in mind the difficulties in determining causation, it was decided that there should be a study to provide up-to-date and reliable information to show whether a problem existed and, if so, its extent. In October 1983, the National Radiological Protection Board was commissioned to undertake a study of the participants and investigate any correlation with radiation exposure. The study compared the mortality and cancer incidence of more than 22,000 men who took part in the tests with a similar group of service men and civilians who were not involved in the tests.

The study, the results of which were published in the *British Medical Journal*, concluded, as the right hon. Member acknowledges, that participation in the tests had no detectable effect on the participants' life expectancy. Nor did the study establish a causal relationship between the incidence of cancer and participation in the nuclear test programme; and, in particular, there was no evidence of

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

increased incidence of any cancer with increased radiation dose, contrary to what might have been expected if those cancers were radiation-induced.

Mr. Ashley: I am absolutely incredulous at the Minister's speech. Does he deny that the report to which he referred said:

"There may well have been small hazards of leukaemia and multiple myeloma associated with participation in the tests"? Will he deal with the new evidence which I have raised and which was brought forward in a television programme, bearing in mind that the Americans are paying their veterans and have given them the benefit of the doubt? Why cannot the Minister give the benefit of the doubt to our veterans?

Mr. Hamilton: As to the specific parts of the study, the right hon. Gentleman anticipates me; I am about to come to leukaemia and multiple myeloma and will also refer to the American compensation scheme.

As the right hon. Member said, the study showed a small but statistically significant increase in the incidence of certain leukaemias and multiple myeloma in test participants, compared with the control group. However —I think he would also acknowledge this—the control group exhibited an extraordinary low incidence of those two cancers compared with the average for England and Wales and the NRPB concluded that those differences were likely to be largely due to chance.

The right hon. Gentleman criticises the NRPB's presentation of its conclusions. I can say only that the NRPB is an independent and internationally respected scientific institution. Its report was well received by the medical community and has not been criticised by any of the leaders in epidemiology. Internationally accepted estimates of risk from radiation predict that not one person would be expected to die as a result of exposure to radiation from the United Kingdom test programme.

The Government regard the result of the NRPB study as vindicating their view that the safety precautions adopted during the test programme were effective. The report went on to recommend that observations on the groups of participants and controls should be maintained for a further 10 years and the Government were pleased to accept that suggestion. The NRPB will, therefore, continue to monitor the cancer and mortality incidence of the participants over a 10-year period and will publish an updated study next year.

I now turn to the specific points made by the right hon. Gentleman. I must say at the outset that the irresponsible and sometimes misleading allegations made by the "Dispatches" television programme, from which the right hon. Gentleman drew many of his points, were based on a series of factual inaccuracies. The unfounded allegations made by the programme can only add unnecessarily to the concern and anxiety of those who participated in the nuclear test programme and their relatives.

An example is that the programme showed some people wearing special clothing but not radiation badges, the implication being that the participants were being improperly protected and monitored. The clothing was used, in fact, as protection against the intense heat flash from the detonations. As they were located at a mustering point at least 34 km from ground zero at the time of detonation, the dose from the flash radiation would have been zero.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the United States compensation scheme. What he knows, but has failed to tell the House, is that the scheme works where people are present at a detonation and within 20 miles of it. As he will know, the vast majority of people on Christmas island were 34 kms away and so would not have been eligible for compensation under the American scheme if it had been operating. Similarly, it would be absurd to contend that participants who were upwind of the tests could have been exposed to radioactive fallout. As a result, there would have been no necessity to issue them with film badges.

The programme also alleges that the Grapple Y test went wrong. If that is the case, it follows that those responsible for the conduct of the tests either deliberately connived in a massive deception or that they unknowingly did not correctly interpret the manifestations at the time and were thus guilty of negligence or professional incompetence. The records show that the Grapple Y test was detonated at a height of 8,000 ft at the intended diagonal distance of 2·5 km from the point of bomb release to the detonation point, corresponding to a distance of 1·7 km from the south-east point of Christmas island.

I am mystified by the allegations in the "Dispatches" programme that the official detonation distance from Christmas island was meant to be 5 miles or 8 km. There are no official records to support this. In terms of exposure of participants, of course, it would have made no difference if the weapon had been detonated at 8 km or zero km from the south-east point of the island. Doses at the nearest mustering point would still have been zero.

The main evidence in the television programme to support the allegation that the bomb detonated at 800 ft is the statement made by Captain Stewart, who was a co-pilot of a Shackelton flying on a shipping patrol some 60 miles away, as he said himself, at the time of detonation. At such a distance much of the evidence on which to base an eyeball estimation is below the horizon and he could not have seen the point of detonation. If the detonation had occurred at 800 ft, large amounts of water would have been sucked into the cloud giving rise to massive fallout over parts of the island. If test veterans had been exposed to that fallout, as the programme implied, severe symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and beta burns would have been manifested within hours of the detonation among all participants, with deaths from radiation sickness some weeks later. No such symptoms were observed. Furthermore, the radiation from that fallout would have been impossible to hide since it would have been apparent in the fallout pattern over the entire world.

The "Dispatches" programme alleges that there was heavy rain off Christmas island on 28 April 1958 which substantially increased the amount of radioactive fallout. All that I can say to the right hon. Gentleman is that, shortly after the test, extensive environmental monitoring did not measure any deposition of radioactive materials from the detonation. On the basis of that evidence, therefore, there could have been no exposure to internal contamination as a result of inhalation, as suggested by the right hon. Gentleman. I confirm that sea water from swimming areas, drinking water, fish and locally gathered foods, such as coconuts, were continuously sampled and no traces of radioactive contamination were found.

The programme further alleges that the instruments used to measure radiation during the Grapple megaton nuclear bomb tests were not capable of measuring beta radiation. Of course, that allegation is totally without foundation since the instruments used on the nuclear weapon tests were of the beta/gamma type, capable of measuring both types of radiation.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what criteria were used to designate areas of Christmas island safe or not safe. Any area or task in which it was expected that there might be radiation doses that were not trivial, or where pessimistically there might, however unlikely, be a possibility of exposure to radiation that was not trivial, was identified and entry to it stringently controlled. All persons entering such areas, or who might have to undertake tasks with radiation or radioactive substances, were issued with personal film badges. Additionally, the levels of radiation throughout the island were known and, in places occupied by the participants, the levels did not differ from the ever-present background and were considerably less than would have been experienced in the course of living in the United Kingdom.

There are many factual errors in the New Zealand study entitled "Mortality and Cancer Incidence in New Zealand Participants in United Kingdom Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Pacific". Those errors were pointed out to the New Zealand authorities before publication, but were not amended in the final report. As an example, the authors assumed that the average dose to which Royal New Zealand navy personnel were exposed to be identical to that received by Royal Navy personnel—taken to be 5·2 mSv. In fact, the duties of the respective navies were quite different. The closest that the New Zealand ships ever approached ground zero at the time of any of the detonations was 40 km upwind and their dose was, therefore, not significantly different from zero.

A further factual error is the statement in the New Zealand report that

"there could have been significant external exposure to neutron doses".

It is irrefutable that neutron doses at a distance of 40 km from ground zero at the time of detonation were zero. Indeed, the total dose from all sources of radiation, neutron and gamma, was trivial at a distance 7·5 km from ground zero, and the neutron dose would have been a small fraction of this. But if any nuclear test participant had been close enough to receive a measurable neutron dose he would have been killed instantly by accompanying blast and thermal effects.

It is a salutary lesson on the vagaries of statistics that, despite exposure levels to radiation from the tests being zero, an increased incidence of leukaemia compared with the average of New Zealand is still documented in the report. I should also point out to the right hon. Gentleman that the New Zealand report found no increased incidence of multiple myeloma.

The right hon. Gentleman asks if I will place in the Library a copy of an unpublished paper by Dr. Headley Marston on the fallout of strontium 90 from nuclear explosions. I regret that, despite searches initiated by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy in Australia, for which I am grateful, the document has not yet been traced.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 21 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

The Consolidated Fund Act 1991

The Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Act 1991

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 16 April at Seven o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: As Bills 1 to 8 have blocking motions, with the leave of the House I shall put them together.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

HOOK ISLAND (POOLE BAY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 18 April.

TAY ROAD BRIDGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Tay Road Bridge and the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Wednesday 27 March and to be printed. [Bill 121.]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Labelling

1. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what future arrangements he will be making for monitoring the accuracy of food labelling as a result of information recently gained by his Department relating to orange juice.

7. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what future arrangements he will be making for monitoring the accuracy of food labelling as a result of his Department's recent information about the labelling of orange juice.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): My scientists analyse a wide range of foodstuffs for various reasons as part of our comprehensive programme of monitoring and surveillance. I will be following up the particular matter to which my hon. Friends refer with further sampling.

Mr. Shaw: I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his officials on the way in which this monitoring has been done and on the fact that some major mistakes have been identified. Members of the British public who, like me, enjoy a daily glass of orange juice and want it pure, undiluted and from a properly labelled carton are very grateful to him.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for that. The fact is that this was a labelling and not a public health matter, but it is not acceptable that orange juice labelled pure and unadulterated should turn out to be rather less unadulterated than it should be.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on this matter? It will give the British public a great deal of reassurance to know that they have officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food continually on the watch to protect them from such serious abuse of the food labelling regulations. When may we expect to make further progress with food labelling regulations, finish the period of discussion with our European colleagues and introduce a more comprehensive system of food labelling regulations for fats, salt and sugar?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has always taken a great interest in this. I assure him that we are in the lead in matters to do with food labelling. The Food Advisory Committee has been doing work on this in Britain. Much of labelling is now in the European Community domain, of course, and we take a lead in the Community in ensuring that the public have clear labelling of what is in the products that they buy. It is not my intention to tell the public what they ought to eat; it is my intention to allow them to choose for themselves—that is why they need proper labels.

Countryside (Access)

2. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about access to the countryside in set-aside areas and environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Gummer: Existing rights of public access are preserved over land which is entered under the set-aside and environmentally sensitive areas schemes. Neither scheme imposes additional obligations as regards access, but the meadowland option of the related countryside premium scheme provides areas set aside for walking and quiet enjoyment by the public.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that, as more than 10 million people enjoy walking as a pastime, at Easter and on other public holidays many honey spots in the countryside will be overused and peace and quiet will be denied to people going out to enjoy them? Is not there a good argument for increasing the number of parts of Britain to which people can gain access and spreading the money that people spend when they go out into the countryside? Will the Government try to incorporate in the set-aside and environmentally sensitive schemes some encouragement to farmers to improve access?

Mr. Gummer: I think that access is best improved by improving footpaths, bridleways and the like. We must also recognise that in all these areas a balance must be maintained. In our environmentally sensitive areas it is sometimes access that causes much of the problem. I cite for instance, the difficulties in the South Downs where access for people with dogs makes it extremely difficult to graze those areas in the way that would be desirable. I also remind the hon. Gentleman that problems in the Pennine Way now mean that in some cases and circumstances we are spending more there than on similar lengths of the M1.

Mr. Jopling: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, with the exception of the small areas that he mentioned, there is no particularly good reason why environmentally sensitive areas should have special access to the public, bearing in mind that huge areas of equally sensitive land often adjoin them? My right hon. Friend should concentrate on trying to expand the environmentally sensitive areas, which have been so successful.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not mind my saying that such areas are his creation. The fact that the whole of Europe is copying Britain in creating such areas owes much to his perseverance in the Council of Ministers. I should like to see how best we can extend the scheme as time goes on. I emphasise my right hon. Friend's argument that access must often compete with other aspects of the countryside to achieve a balance. To conserve the countryside, we must sometimes restrict rather than extend access. Environmentally sensitive areas will work only if farmers can farm them properly, so we must ensure that the demands and needs of farming play their part in the balance between them.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Has the Minister any plans to introduce compulsory set-aside if the current scheme does not work out to his satisfaction?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman will know that I am deeply opposed to the concept of compulsory set-aside, which is damaging both to the countryside and to the farmer. I seek a system in the European Community in which each country will take a fair share of the amount of set-aside necessary. A voluntary scheme should set a target to be achieved within each country. A voluntary scheme means that farmers must be paid enough to make it possible for them to look after the land, which is in their interests and the wider interests of the country as a whole.

Mr. Boscawen: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we must get the balance right in environmentally sensitive areas. In the Somerset levels, which I represent, there is a genuine need for a limited amount of access to see the birds and fauna there. However, if too many people want to come at once, as they often do, they will destroy the areas that we wish to protect.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. We have spent a lot of money and employed much manpower, especially in the Somerset levels, to try to achieve a balance between the needs of farming and those of wildlife. We have discovered that, by bringing both sides together, the level of water necessary turns out to be very different from that which many conservationists had thought. When one is trying to bring two groups together in such a way, it must be realised that total access to the general public cannot always be afforded if wildlife is to be protected. It is important to achieve a balance. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is among the first to say that he wants not access which destroys the countryside but access which opens it up.

Mr. David Clark: Has the Minister seen the report published today by the national parks review panel, in which he is urged to introduce incentives and payments systems for environmentally friendly farming and public access in all our national parks? Will he do so?

Mr. Gummer: I am not someone who, having read part of a report, immediately jumps to the Dispatch Box to say what he intends to do about it. First, I want to see what the Countryside Commission thinks about the report, as it was received only today. Secondly, the Secretary of State for the Environment and I will want to work out how best to react to the Countryside Commission's proposals. I am not someone who believes that the future of the countryside can be decided by immediate party-political reactions.

Food Prices

3. **Sir Michael Shaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the increase in the price of food to consumers as measured against the retail prices index since 1979.

10. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how much food prices to the consumer have increased since 1979 relative to the retail prices index.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): Since 1979 the price of food has fallen by more than 18 per cent. relative to the retail prices index.

Mr. Michael Shaw: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that that success story owes much to the efforts of British agriculture? Should we not also

realise, however, that those efforts demand a fair return for farmers who put both work and capital into their enterprises to bring about that success?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that the factor that will most benefit the farmer is for us to get on top of inflation. The farmer makes a contribution towards defeating inflation because of the performance of food prices. It is also true that if the farmer wishes to benefit more from consumer spending, the more he can produce processed products that the consumer wants to buy, the better. Nobody goes into a a shop to buy sheep—they go to buy meat products and the more the farmer can get into that business, the more he will benefit from his own primary production.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My hon. Friend has just said something rather interesting—*[Interruption.]* It was not so much unusual, but it anticipated the flow of my own question.

Farmers may well have been contributing to the lowering of inflation. That is unfortunate for them in that they do not receive what they consider to be a proper rate of return. Does my hon. Friend agree that they should therefore concentrate their efforts on getting value added and adding some sex appeal to the crops that they sell?

Mr. Curry: It is true that people selling unbranded commodities will never receive the same return from them as the people who take the commodity, transform it, package it and give it new appeal. It is equally true that the consumer clearly wants the processed convenience product. The more that farmers can get into that business through greater collaborative effort and greater links with the retail trade, the more they will realise the benefits of their own primary production.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister accept that the price paid to the producers—farmers—is an extremely low percentage of the price paid by consumers? Does he also accept that unless a proper check is kept on the prices paid to producers there will inevitably be a shortfall in production, which will put prices to consumers through the ceiling? Will he endeavour to assist farmers in marketing their produce so that they can gain more for the agricultural produce of their farms?

Mr. Curry: We certainly try to take our decisions in European negotiations and in the Ministry with a view to helping British farmers get their products on the table in front of British housewives and other people. It is also true that the reason for lower returns in agriculture is the persistence of over-supply in the marketplace. The greatest service that we can do for a farmer is to conquer the problem of over-supply and inflation. When we can do that, the farmer will be able to realise his returns much more easily.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that, notwithstanding the prices to which he refers, for the first time in the 21 years I have been a Member of Parliament, the farmers and farm workers in Bolsover, Derbyshire and other parts of the country are fed up to the back teeth with the Government and the common agricultural policy? They used to paint the grass blue in Bolsover at election time, but they have said that they will never do it again.

Mr. Curry: If the farmers were to vote for the hon. Gentleman, they would undergo a rapid learning curve and only make that mistake once.

Farm Gate Prices

4. Mr. Alexander: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage farm gate prices have increased since 1979 relative to the retail prices index.

Mr. Curry: The index of producer prices of agricultural products increased at an average annual rate of 3·6 per cent. between 1979 and 1990, compared with 7·5 per cent. for all items in the retail prices index.

Mr. Alexander: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures that he has produced show how essential it is, not least for the farmers in Bolsover, that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer continues with policies that will bear down on inflation? When my hon. Friend goes to Brussels and talks to Commissioner MacSharry, will he give him those figures and ensure that if there is any reform of the common agricultural policy, as is proposed, the returns to British farmers all over the country will not be further reduced as a result?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend and I will be in Brussels next Monday and Tuesday, when no doubt these subjects will be on the agenda. We agree with my hon. Friend. We have made it clear to Mr. MacSharry and our colleagues that, although we agree that changes must be made and that prices must fall closer to those of the marketplace, agriculture should be based on commercially viable farms and the United Kingdom farmer should not be discriminated against merely because he is efficient, modern and effective.

Mr. William Ross: How many other people in the food production chain from the farmer to the housewife have taken an actual cut in incomes since 1979?

Mr. Curry: Incomes will not be buoyant if the market is constantly over-supplied. If farmers wish to achieve better returns, the Government must conquer inflation and over-supply and take more interest in producing what the consumer wants in the form that the consumer wants it. If the consumer wants products that the farmer thinks inappropriate, it is the farmer and not the consumer who is wrong. There is only one market and it must deliver what the consumer wants.

Mr. Marland: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the drop in farm gate prices. Will he confirm that to raise farm gate prices farmers must add more value to their products? Will he further confirm that grant aid and advice is available from the Ministry to encourage and help farmers to find different ways of adding value to their products to make them more acceptable in the marketplace?

Mr. Curry: Farmers should certainly use all the help that is available. I do not wish to transform agriculture into some form of cottage industry producing pies and salami, but unless farmers get further down the food chain and produce goods that people want by adding value on the farm, they will be stuck with producing unbranded raw materials. As I said, people do not go into supermarkets to buy sheep—they buy products, which is what the farmer must produce.

Decommissioning

5. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to meet the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Curry: I see the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations regularly, and it is well aware of the Government's view on decommissioning.

Mr. Mitchell: In that case, it will be very depressed. Does the Minister recognise that the whole of the British fishing industry is crying out for a decommissioning scheme? Does he not recognise that that is the most effective contribution that he can make to conservation and that unless the Government introduce a proper conservation programme we shall get more daft Euro-measures imposed on us like the eight-day lay-off?

Mr. Curry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for any influence that he may have had on the letter that I received this morning from the Grimsby fish producer organisation thanking us for our excellent efforts in producing the gear option as an alternative to the tie-up scheme.

A decommissioning scheme is not the most effective method. Taking out old boats would be bad value and taking out new boats would be bad economics. If some boats are taken out under a decommissioning scheme, the remaining boats must be controlled to prevent them from simply mopping up all the additional effort; otherwise, there would have to be a new system of regulation, including compulsory tie-ups for longer periods than those that we unfortunately have at present.

Mr. John Townend: I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I do not welcome his remarks on a decommissioning scheme, but what other initiatives will he take to reduce the fishing effort? In particular, will he consider making it illegal for prawn fishermen to carry two sizes of net—70 mm and 90 mm—as that makes conservation enforcement practically impossible?

Mr. Curry: We have just completed a consultation with the industry. We considered whether we should introduce a square mesh panel on nets used for the nephrops fishery. We suggested a 70 mm square panel, but the industry said that it would like to go further. I shall do all that I can to go as far as possible so that we do not catch so many small round fish in the nephrops fishery. That is an important conservation measure.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Minister accept that he is totally isolated from the fishing community in his opposition to decommissioning and in his support for the eight-day tie-up? Does he understand that even members of the Conservative party are embarrassed by the contemptuous attitude that he showed to Scottish fishermen during the eight-day tie-up debate? When will there be a reversal of policy to support decommissioning and to oppose the life-threatening eight-day tie-up?

Mr. Curry: To be isolated is not necessarily to be wrong —and I do not accept that I am isolated. The hon. Gentleman's remarks about the previous debate are silly. He suggests that fishermen want to be able to fish exactly as they have always fished and yet to have conservation. That cannot be delivered.

If fishermen genuinely want conservation, they can take their suggestions about mesh sizes further forward. I shall always listen to them. Since I have been a fisheries Minister, not one hon. Member who has asked to bring a delegation of fishermen to see me has ever been refused. That offer remains open.

Mr. Morley: The Minister knows very well that he is isolated on the decommissioning issue in terms both of the industry and of Europe. The revision of the common fisheries policy provides an opportunity to use the available structural funds to finance a proper decommissioning scheme which takes account of all the points that the hon. Gentleman raised. Will he take the opportunity to tap into that funding? Will he also use the opportunity offered by the review of regional policies to extend the Hague preference south from Bridlington to include all the east coast ports?

Mr. Curry: I know that the Hague preference is a sensitive issue. It is designed for the northern communities. The Scottish industry attaches particular importance to it. Even the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) would agree that it is particularly important to the Scottish industry and to communities in northern England.

I realise that the Hague preference causes difficulties. As I am anxious that the review of the fisheries policy should be a limited review—I do not want the common fisheries policy to be busted open, because we benefit greatly from it—I should hesitate before introducing that element into the discussions, as it would encourage other people to seek a wider review than we think would be helpful.

Sheep Industry

6. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with British farmers about the future of the sheep industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My colleagues and I have regular discussions with sheep farmers and their representatives.

Mr. Maclennan: How does the Minister propose to arrest the depressing erosion of incomes of hill and upland farms which are dependent upon the sheep industry? Will he do three things? Will he announce his proposals to end the sheepmeat variable premium? Will he support a private storage scheme to ease the undoubted danger of fluctuations occuring in the market following the ending of the variable premium scheme? May we have a five-year continuance of the wool guarantee, as wool constitutes some 14 per cent. of the incomes of sheep farmers in the hills and uplands?

Mr. Curry: We retain the option to accelerate the phase-out of the variable premium. When we take that decision, we shall certainly bear in mind the importance of accelerating our exports and getting rid of the clawback.

Giving a five-year guarantee is not a practical proposition. We recently increased the hill livestock compensatory allowances. About £400 million per year goes into the British sheep industry as a whole, a large proportion of it to the less-favoured areas. We recently increased HLCAs by £142 million. We have a system of market support in the livestock sector which costs us £800

million per year. That is a great deal of taxpayers' money to support the industry. We are committed to that industry.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my hon. Friend accept that farmers are worried about the difference between the price that they get at market for their sheep for slaughter and the price that the housewife has to pay? Does he accept that, because of the demise of high street butcheries, farmers cannot easily sell their products to supermarkets, which refuse to take their produce locally? Will my hon. Friend's Department investigate that aspect of the red meat trade?

Mr. Curry: I have always found that when the farmers have some complaint about the retail sector, it is best to get the Women's Farming Union on to the matter. It appears to be the last paramilitary body in Britain and is extremely effective. I would hesitate to tell shops where to do their purchasing.

Mr. Pike: The Minister will know that sheep farmers are very unhappy about the severe financial difficulties in which they find themselves at present and are concerned about the Government's policy towards their industry. Will he assure them that there will be no repetition of the French lamb wars which, understandably, caused a major public outcry in Britain last year?

Mr. Curry: I hope that I have a certain amount of authority at the Ministry, but I am not sure that my writ extends to the behaviour of French farmers. I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that I attended a Paris show recently especially to advertise the qualities of British lamb on our stand there. We shall do our best to put our producers in touch with French buyers when we can supply what they want and we shall continue insistently to make it known to the French Government that we expect free trade for our product. Despite all the problems, we exported more live lambs to France last year than the year before.

Common Agricultural Policy

8. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reform of the common agricultural policy.

9. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has to report on reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: The Government continue to press for reforms of the common agricultural policy that will make European Community agriculture more market oriented, reduce budget costs, lead to closer integration between agricultural and environmental policies and apply fairly throughout the Community.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the considerable efforts that he is putting into securing reform of the CAP. Will he make every effort to ensure, in any reforms that are achieved, that the British farmer will not be disadvantaged in relation to farmers on the continent?

Mr. Gummer: As British farmers have already gone through an agricultural revolution since the war, my hon. Friend would expect me to insist that it would be wrong for them to be penalised a second time while other farmers failed to go through such a revolution. That is why we so utterly oppose the proposals that Mr. MacSharry has put before the Council.

Mr. Butler: Whatever reforms are adopted, will my right hon. Friend ensure that British farmers are not the only ones who have to stick by the rules and that farming practices throughout the Community are monitored properly?

Mr. Gummer: The most important thing is to get people to accept the tough side of a world, in which surplus production bears so heavily on farmers' incomes—that everybody must obey the same rules. We are considering carefully whether there are better ways in which to monitor observance of the rules throughout the Community and, indeed, in Britain, so that farmers can feel that there is a level playing field and a fair deal for all.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister agree that some sectors of agriculture require reform more urgently than others? Does he accept that the growth in lamb production has reached the stage at which some constraints are urgently needed and is he sympathetic to the idea of quotas in the sheep sector?

Mr. Gummer: I do not think that quotas would be a good thing in general or in the United Kingdom in particular. In the past two or three years there has been an advance beyond sense in the number of lambs produced in some countries, but what is needed is a fair deal in the European Community to ensure that parts of the Community that produce excellent lamb should be able to continue to do so. As British lamb is, without doubt, the best in the world, we want it to continue to be produced and sold and we will not have those activities stopped by those who do not like the competition.

Dr. David Clark: May I associate the Opposition with the objectives outlined by the Minister in his initial answer to the question about reform of the CAP? Will he publish the Government's proposals for the CAP so that we can at least have the debate on our terms, not on the European Commissioners' terms?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for our policy, but the most important thing is that we should have a debate in the Council and on the Council's terms rather than having debates outside the Council to pat ourselves on the back.

My job is to get the Community to agree to a reform package. I do not think that the best way to do that is to suggest to the Community that it must accept some prepackaged presentation from this country. My job is to get people on our side. The opportunity for the hon. Gentleman and me to argue with each other here is not as important as the opportunity for both of us to achieve our joint desires in the Council. In those circumstances, the hon. Gentleman must accept that it is better to act through the Council which, in this area, has the authority.

Self-Sufficiency

11. **Mr. Ralph Howell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the self-sufficiency of British agriculture in 1979-80, 1984-85 and 1989-90.

Mr. Gummer: Self-sufficiency in foods that can be produced in the United Kingdom was 71 per cent. in 1979-80, 80 per cent. in 1984-85 and about 74 per cent. in 1989-90.

Mr. Howell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he acknowledge the great contribution that British agriculture makes to the economy in general and the special contribution that is made by the cereals sector? Will he ensure that, in any future GATT negotiations, the aggressive attitude of the Americans is kept well in check?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend could not say other than that, on this point, I have been as aggressive as any of the American negotiators. European farmers—British farmers among them—must have equal access to world markets. I will not accept measures that would improve the position of the United States but reduce the opportunities for Europe. However, concentration on self-sufficiency could easily hide the fact that we need to increase our sales in the rest of Europe, as well as the fact that our home market today is the whole of Europe, not merely the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cryer: Is not the balance of trade deficit in agricultural products between the United Kingdom and the rest of the Common Market about £5,000 million? Does not it demonstrate that, for the United Kingdom, the CAP has been a ghastly and costly failure? That is especially so in view of the fact that, since 1979, the Government have contributed about £14,000 million under the CAP. Does not this demonstrate the need for reform of the CAP as a matter of drastic urgency and will the Government do something about that? Secondly, could not British farmers contribute more to the production of the nation's food?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has got his facts the wrong way round. The common agricultural policy has enabled us to produce a great deal more of the food that we need. However, the consumers of Britain want choice. The hon. Gentleman said that the balance of trade deficit in agricultural products is £5,000 million, but the foods that that figure covers include many that cannot be produced in this country. However, there is £2,500 million worth of food that we could produce. I do not recommend that people buy British when British is not best, but I believe that farmers, other producers, manufacturers and retailers could do a great deal more to use home sources, so long as they produce food that the public want. It is for the consumer to decide; we have to meet his demand.

Agricultural Tenancy Law

12. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the response to his consultation paper on the reform of agricultural tenancy law.

Mr. Gummer: The closing date for responses to the consultation exercise is 13 May. Early indications are of widespread acceptance of the need for change, but, quite properly, the various interests are taking time to prepare their considered responses. All comments will be weighed very carefully by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and myself before any decisions are made.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge the serious decline in the agricultural rented sector since the end of the second world war? Does he agree that it would be in the best interests of British agriculture if that trend were reversed? Will he ensure that any new agricultural tenancy legislation will be positive enough to encourage the industry to be dynamic and flexible, so that it may be able to compete in the 1990s? Does he agree that freedom within contract might be the best basis of any new legislation?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. The tenanted sector is indeed in decline. We want to improve the opportunities for new entrants to the farming industry. The only way to achieve that is to ensure that more land is available. That is why I have made some radical propositions for change in the landlord and tenant scheme. I am pleased that there is widespread acceptance of both the need for more land and the need for radical change.

Farm Gate Prices

13. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how much farm gate prices have increased since 1979 relative to the retail prices index.

Mr. Curry: The index of producer prices of agricultural products increased at an average annual rate of 3·6 per cent. between 1979 and 1990 compared with 7·5 per cent. for all items in the retail prices index.

Mr. Hague: Does my hon. Friend agree that that shows that the British farmer has given tremendous value for money to the consumer in the past 12 years? Does he further agree that if every other industry in Britain had achieved efficiency and productivity improvements comparable with British agriculture during the same period, we should be one of the richest nations on earth?

Mr. Curry: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The farmers of Richmond, Skipton and Ripon are in the forefront of the achievement of which my hon. Friend speaks.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

14. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): The incidence of confirmed cases of BSE over the past 12 months is 3·9 cases per thousand of the total adult cattle population in Great Britain and 0·24 cases per thousand of the adult cattle population in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Smith: Will the Minister confirm that the Government's advisory committee on BSE was forecasting a monthly incidence of 350 to 400 cases? Does he share my concern that the actual incidence for February was more than 1,500 cases? How does the Minister explain the actual incidence so greatly exceeding the estimate? What does he intend to do about that? In the interests of farmers, consumers and animals, will he now review his decision to close a number of veterinary inspection centres?

Mr. Maclean: All the safety measures are in place to protect the public and that is our prime concern. Independent experts are constantly reviewing the safety precautions that we have taken. As for the number of BSE cases, if the hon. Gentleman studies the figures and graphs that we produce on a weekly basis, he will see that the predicted pattern usually rises in February and March every year and declines during the rest of the year. This year is no exception. The BSE incidence is following the pattern of previous years.

Food and Drink (Exports)

15. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to boost British exports of food and drink.

Mr. Gummer: The Government are firmly committed to supporting Food From Britain in its efforts to encourage exports of British food and drink.

Mr. Wareing: Is the Minister aware that the £5·1 million deficit on food and drink was the biggest of any sector in this country's trade deficit for last year? Is he further aware that half that deficit was with countries with no particular climatic advantage over Britain, such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium? Will he acknowledge that in those countries, seven times as much money is provided for the budgets of bodies such as our Food From Britain to enhance the export and sale of food and drink? Will the right hon. Gentleman pull his finger out and do something to ensure that Food From Britain has an adequate budget relative to our economic needs?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should realise that much of that money comes from the industry. He asks me to pull my finger out, but I urge him to remind the House that the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesman on agriculture has told people that he does not eat British sausages and will not eat English apples. While the Labour party undermines products from this country and casts aspertions on the safety of British food, the hon. Gentleman is in no position to tell me how to deal with Food From Britain.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the raspberry is a most pleasant fruit and that over 80 per cent. of the raspberries grown commercially in the United Kingdom, and in Europe, are grown in Tayside. Is he aware that this marvellous export—the raspberry—is at risk because the European Community is allowing dumping from eastern Europe?

Mr. Gummer: I have been fighting to protect the British raspberry not just to help my hon. Friend's constituency but because I am particularly fond of raspberries. I give my hon. Friend the assurance that the Government support British products and believe that British raspberries are the best that one could have. I hope that the same support for British products will come from the Labour party, which is constantly undermining our producers.

Butter and Meat

16. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what improvements he plans to the scheme to distribute butter and meat.

Mr. Curry: This year I intend to give preference to organisations capable of distributing products widely throughout their community and to groups of smaller organisations co-operating in the same locality.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister admit that his organisation of the scheme has been the target for widespread criticism? As organisations have to receive a minimum of 1 tonne of butter or meat, may I ask him to do everything possible to help with transport costs? Will he ensure that the butter and meat are available to the largest number of people, including all pensioners and not just those on income support?

Mr. Curry: No, I will not. It would be ridiculous to try to distribute the food to all old-age pensioners. I can think of some old-age pensioners in the House who have no need of hand-outs from the taxpayer. It is much better for the food to be directed to the homeless, the destitute, those on income support, those on family credit and those living in hostels, as was intended. That is a much better solution to a rather bad scheme.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Eastham: Noting that unemployment has gone up by more than 300,000 in 10 months, to the highest rate in any EC country, may I ask why we have the second deepest recession in 10 years when we have our own coal, our own natural gas and our own North sea oil bringing in £90 billion? The CBI is telling us that by the end of the year 2·25 million people will be unemployed and that unemployment will increase further next year. What is the Prime Minister's excuse for that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will also have seen the very strong welcome from the CBI for the measures in the Budget that will help the cash flow and reduce the taxation of businesses. He will also be aware of the unprecedented amount of help available for people who are unemployed. We have geared that particularly to the areas where unemployment is most severe.

Sir Timothy Raison: Will my right hon. Friend consider the grave famine that is developing in Africa? Will he make sure that we and the European Community deliver quickly as much aid as possible?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is studying precisely that matter at the moment.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister agree that Question Time is an appropriate moment for him to apologise to taxpayers for the £14·3 billion that his Government have wasted on the poll tax fiasco?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should explain his phoney figures, for he will know that included

in his figure is £3 billion for non-payment created partly by his own side urging people not to pay and that the vast majority of the remainder is money that is available to provide extra money for local services. Would he remove that extra money for local services?

Mr. Kinnock: It was the Prime Minister who described the poll tax as uncollectable when he spoke to his hon. Friends earlier this week. After wasting all that money, why is he not big enough simply to say sorry?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman did not listen. The money that he has counted as wasted is money that will be available for local services. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that money is wasted on local services he should make it clear.

Mr. Batiste: Will my right hon. Friend try to find time to reschedule his visit to the Vickers tank factory in Leeds which he had to cancel a few weeks ago due to bad weather? Is he aware that many people there would like to hear from him, following his visit to the Gulf, how the Challenger tank performed and would like to express to him the urgent need for the Government to come to a decision on the replacement contract for the Chieftain tank?

The Prime Minister: I was certainly sorry—*[Interruption.]*—that I was unable to make that particular visit. *[Interruption.]* I am always happy to spread a little amity in the Chamber, so I repeat to my hon. Friend that I am sorry that I was unable to visit the factory, when I would have been able to tell the workers that the Challenger tank performed absolutely magnificently in the Gulf—far above the expectations that anyone could have had of it. I hope that we shall soon be able to draw all the lessons that we need from that and make a decision on Challenger 2.

Q2. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Prime Minister aware that the toast in Scotland tonight will be to absent enemies—Thatcher and the poll tax—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We use the constituency name here.

Mr. Sillars: It will not really matter in Scotland, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: But it does here.

Mr. Sillars: I am talking about the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and the poll tax. When will the Prime Minister acknowledge his personal political debt to the non-payers who destroyed the poll tax by making it uncollectable? If we had not done so, it would still be here, she would still be here and he would not be the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: In what he has just said the hon. Gentleman makes clear precisely why his party is so unattractive and undesirable. I am sure that his remarks are not remotely the feelings of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Tracey: Will my right hon. Friend sympathise with the disgust of the great majority of the British public at those people who have not paid their share towards local government finance? Will he give an undertaking that people who have not paid their community charge will be pursued?

The Prime Minister: I certainly will. My hon. Friend might share my view that the disgust is redoubled at those people in elected positions who have perhaps persuaded people not to pay.

Q3. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kennedy: As regards the scheme for a reduction in overall poll tax figures, announced by the Chancellor in the Budget statement this week which has become known, I gather, as the Ribble Valley rebate, will the Prime Minister explain why those who will benefit most are those best able to pay and why the people who are still on rebates in the lowest category of income, by the Government's definition, will not enjoy the same degree of reduction from the real poll tax figure which they have to pay? Can that possibly be just?

The Prime Minister: I would not have expected such a stupid question from the hon. Gentleman. Even he should recognise that one cannot give a rebate to people who are not expected to pay in the first place.

Mr. Burt: Should not the real apologies in local government come from the spendthrift Labour councils which have broken ceiling after ceiling and from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen who still refuse to spell out their proposals to control local authority finance?

The Prime Minister: Of course, they will not spell out their proposals. They do not know what they are. They are still dithering.

Q4. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does the Prime Minister recall that on nine occasions he supported the poll tax legislation through the House and cast his vote accordingly? Does he now regret that? If he had his time again, would he give such strong personal support to that legislation?

The Prime Minister: I indicated clearly throughout the debates on the community charge that I thought that the principle was correct. The hon. Gentleman will know our new proposals in a matter of moments and he might reserve judgment until then.

Mr. Lester: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, far from what Opposition Members say, the greatest contribution that this place makes to society is that we all believe in the rule of law and in the ways in which one can change laws within the democratic framework, not by protesting or refusing to pay the poll tax?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the principle of what my hon. Friend said. However, I think that he was being over-generous when he said that everyone in the House believes that. Clearly, some Opposition Members do not.

Q5. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Williams: Does the Prime Minister recall that in the 1989 autumn statement he predicted that inflation would be down to 5·5 per cent. at the end of last year and that he revised that figure to 7·25 per cent. in the last Budget? In fact, it turned out to be over 10 per cent. What credibility should we give the Chancellor's forecast that inflation will fall to 4 per cent. by the end of the year when the rise in average earnings is 9 per cent., electricity prices are to go up by 13 per cent., water charges are to go up by 16 per cent. and petrol will rise by 20p a gallon?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is accurate in saying that inflation is currently higher than I expected it to be. However, he will also know that it is not just my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's forecast that inflation is falling dramatically. That forecast is shared by almost every independent forecaster and I think that the hon. Gentleman will see the accuracy of it in the months to come.

Q6. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to consider the part played by small firms in turning west Norfolk into an economic success story? Is he aware that during the past few weeks they have lobbied hard for various Budget measures? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Chancellor listened to them and that Tuesday's Budget was an outstanding Budget for small businesses?

The Prime Minister: It certainly was an outstanding Budget for small businesses and my hon. Friend, who has a long-standing interest in them, is in a good position to judge that. His view was reflected by the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, which described my right hon. Friend's Budget as

"one to bring a smile to small businesses."

That is the clearest possible illustration of the way in which small businesses have accepted the Budget.

The Gulf

Q7. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what further plans he has to visit the Gulf region.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Corbyn: That is rather strange since the question was about the Gulf.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Corbyn: I am quite good at lip-reading and I assume that the Prime Minister said that he was not preparing to go to the Gulf region again. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister should visit the Gulf region and assess the results of the war. There were 150,000 casualties and deaths, there is martial law in Kuwait and environmental destruction throughout the region. It is the product of arms sales. Does the Prime Minister consider that all the money that has been spent by the Government on the Gulf war compares unfavourably with the miserly figure of £28 million spent on the African famine? Should not the right hon. Gentleman now create peace in the Gulf and give resources to solve the African famine?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman in his litany missed out one or two material facts—the liberation of Kuwait for a start. He also missed out the fact that the Iraqis were murdering Kuwaitis, dismantling Kuwait, damaging the environment and committing unpardonable sins. I very much regret that the hon. Gentleman does not recall that.

Engagements

Q8. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Carrington: The proposal in the Budget to establish high street share shops is greatly welcomed by all of us who want shares in public companies to be more widely held by the public at large. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that high street share shops must conform to all the provisions of the Financial Services Act?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that to my hon. Friend. The proposed high street share shops will be subject to the Financial Services Act. That will certainly be made clear and I very much hope that this new way of distributing shares will be successful.

Local Government Review (England)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement outlining progress on the review of local government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House, and the country, too, have been waiting for this statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The House will remember that when I announced the review on 5 December I explained the comprehensive nature of our review. For the first time we are looking at the structure, functions and finance of local government in the round.

I should like to thank the very large number of people and organisations who have put forward their views. I do not need to tell the House that they have not always been compatible one with another.

We took as our starting point our firm belief that the local delivery of certain services—many of them essential—is a central feature of a pluralist society. Local government must enable local people to exercise continuing influence over the quality and the range of the services which Parliament entrusts to them.

Local government is responsible for the efficient delivery of these services. We need responsible, elected local authorities, not only to provide a check and a balance to Westminster, but also to reflect the multiplicity of aspirations amongst local communities.

But, given the primary responsibilities of central Government, local government cannot be a fully independent power in the land. It traditionally derives its power from Parliament, and it must complement and not compete with central Government in its activities.

Within this framework, we believe that councils should be accountable for their actions and that there should be a direct and visible relationship between the costs of services and the local bills to which they give rise. We believe that those bills should be spread widely and fairly throughout communities; that they should bear some relation to people's ability to pay; and that it should be possible to levy and collect them without difficulty.

These principles are guiding our review. I am able to announce today some interim conclusions and, in other areas, to narrow the options so as to proceed to more detailed consultations.

Many parts of England now have, in effect, unitary local government. The Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils were abolished in 1986. The Inner London education authority went in 1990. There is little demand for their restoration. Indeed, it is difficult now to perceive any real role that they played.

Outside the main conurbations, leaving aside the valuable rolë played by parishes, the system of two principal tiers is being questioned. Also being questioned is the continued existence of certain of the authorities which were created by the local government reorganisation of 1974, but which have not succeeded in inspiring local loyalty. Another challenge is that the role of authorities is changing as they increasingly become enablers rather than direct providers of services.

There is, therefore, now an opportunity to think afresh about the structure of local authorities. But the Government do not see this as an opportunity to impose a new pattern of local authorities according to a national prescription. Nor do we believe that it is necessary to have a uniform pattern of authorities in every part of the country. Local people should have an important role in determining what structure of local government best reflects their community loyalties. That does not mean, therefore, the wholesale abolition of either county councils or district councils, nor even unitary authorities everywhere. It means arriving at the right solution for each community. We intend to adopt a practical approach in response to local views and local conditions, but it seems likely that we shall move to a larger number of unitary authorities.

We shall, therefore, consult on the proposition that a local government commission shall be charged with responsibility for evaluating the most appropriate form of local government for individual areas, taking account of the wishes of local people and putting forward proposals for reform. We will proceed area by area.

The reduction in the local tax burden and the correspondingly larger contribution from central taxation announced in my right hon. Friend's Budget statement imply a need to consider whether a number of functions should now be brought into or financed directly by central Government. That would be without further changes to the balance between central and local taxation.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is bringing forward today proposals for such a transfer in one area of his responsibility.

The issue of how local authorities are managed is no less crucial. The problems that local authorities face are compounded by the cumbersome internal arrangements for the management of councils. The committee system—which dates back to the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835—requires that all decisions are taken collectively by large numbers of councillors, in full council or committees. Too many councillors spend too much time achieving too little.

Consequently, it is difficult for local government to attract and keep enough men and women of the right calibre both to lead what are now multi-million pound organisations providing a range of key services and to represent properly the interests of the people who elected them. We believe, therefore, that there should be a new look at the internal workings of local authorities to improve the decision-making process. I shall issue a consultation paper on these issues.

Alongside that, we also want to develop further the idea of the enabling council. Many of the Government's policies have been designed to move power to individual members of the community—in particular, the right to buy, the tenants' charter and local management of schools. Compulsory competitive tendering has also been part of that process and we will be looking at ways to make it more effective and to carry it forward. In particular, we will be looking at new areas where contracting out should be applied. Those will include professional and technical tasks, as well as manual tasks. Housing management, legal services and computer services could all be added to the list. The success of a local authority must be measured not by its size, but by the quality of the services delivered, from whatever source, by its responsiveness to its clients and customers and by the value that it squeezes out of each pound of taxpayers' money.

I now turn to the question of finance. A local tax base is essential if there is to be any meaning to the concept of local government. But local government services cost a great deal of money—more than £50 billion in the coming year—and the burden on local taxpayers has become too great. We have therefore decided to make a fundamental shift in the amounts which central and local taxpayers pay towards the cost of local government services. This change will take effect in 1991-92, and will reduce local taxation to a level that should be sustainable in the longer term.

The first consequence of this was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday. We have concluded that it is right to reduce the present average headline community charge of £392 in England for 1991-92 by £140 to £252. The average amount payable by charge payers, after allowing for the community charge reduction scheme and benefits, will then be considerably less than this. To secure this, my right hon. Friend is providing a further £4½ billion from national taxation to local authorities.

As a result, in 1991-92, the community charge will be raising less than rates in their last full year. For the coming year, locally raised finance will fund 22 per cent. of local government expenditure, compared to 34 per cent. this year. And these figures are before the substantial benefit of rebates and the community charge reduction scheme.

To achieve these objectives, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and I are today introducing in the House a short Bill. If enacted, this will have broadly three effects.

First, it will provide that the community charges which authorities have set for 1991-92 are replaced the day after the Bill's enactment by new charges £140 lower. Councils will not need to meet to set the new charges, but they will be treated in all respects as if they were set by authorities in the usual way.

Secondly, my right hon. Friends and I will be empowered to pay grants to charging authorities to make up the loss of income resulting from the reduction in charges brought about by the Bill's provisions. It is also our intention to pay grant to cover authorities' additional administrative expenses arising as a consequence of the Bill.

All this means that where authorities have already issued their charge bills for 1991-92—I know that some authorities have done so—they will, after the Bill's enactment, need to issue fresh bills reflecting their new lower charges. We propose to amend the regulations on the community charge demand notice slightly to provide the basis for the new bills but we believe not in ways that would result in significant changes to authorities' computing arrangements. We are revising the profile of payments from the non-domestic rates pool to ensure that our proposals have no significant effect on authorities' cash flow.

These proposals do not affect the operation of the community charge reduction scheme or community charge benefits, though it will, of course, be necessary to recalculate entitlements under both schemes.

My Department has written to local authorities, and to the local authority associations, explaining the details of all these arrangements. Clearly, it is desirable that the new charges should be in place at the earliest opportunity. Accordingly, we shall be looking to Parliament to consider the Bill as a matter of urgency.

Having reduced community charges to reasonable levels, we shall expect local authorities to restrain their spending to keep them at those levels. I shall therefore be prepared to use my capping powers rigorously again in 1992-93.

Having achieved a reasonable balance between funding from national sources and funding from local tax, we need to address the question of the local tax itself. I referred briefly in my opening remarks to the principles which I believe should underpin any form of local tax. Let me spell them out.

First, accountability. As far as possible, a local tax should buttress the accountability of a local council to its taxpayers. People should be able to see some link between what they are being asked to pay and what their council is spending.

Second, fairness. Nobody likes paying taxes. But in our society taxes have to be basically acceptable to taxpayers; and to achieve that they must be perceived to be fair.

Third, ease of collection. Any tax will require administrative arrangements to collect the revenue, including measures to chase up those who are late in paying. But if the tax is too difficult to collect, the costs of collection become unacceptable.

Fourth, most people should make some contribution. We believe that it is right that, as far as possible, any tax should take some account of the number of adults in each household so that they contribute to the cost of services provided by the local councils which they elect. This principle has gained a wide measure of acceptance.

Fifth, restraint. No tax is acceptable if it is levied at penal rates either as a result of local authority overspending or because the burden on any individual or household is excessively high. We are adamantly opposed to excessively high bills for a minority of electors—a feature of the old rates system.

In accordance with these criteria, we have reached our conclusions about the future of the community charge. In spite of the comprehensive system of income-related rebates, and the reduction scheme that we devised, the public have not been persuaded that the charge is fair. We have therefore decided that from the earliest possible moment the community charge will be replaced by a new system of local taxation.

After a careful reappraisal of the options, we have decided in principle to bring forward a new local tax under which there will be a single bill for each household comprising two essential elements, the number of adults living there and the value of the property. There are a number of ways of assessing values, on a capital or a rental basis, which require careful evaluation and extensive discussion and consultation. But it is our intention that the system that we introduce should have the following features: it should reflect people's concern that the system is fair; the balance of funding as between central taxes and the new local tax should be broadly in line with that announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday; it will be essential to ensure that local taxpayers do not face undue changes in their bills as a result of the introduction of the new local tax arrangements: there will therefore, need to be arrangements to protect them during the transition to the new system; the system should ensure that regional variations in property values do not lead to disproportionate bills in high price areas; there should be rebate arrangements to protect people on low incomes from making a

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disproportionate contribution to local taxation; there must also be restraints to ensure that local taxpayers do not face excessive bills as a result of overspending by local councils, either before or after the introduction of the new system: there are a number of ways, including capping, by which this may be achieved.

I made clear at the beginning of this statement my commitment to the institution of local government. But, for its part, local government must recognise economic reality and the duty and responsibility of central Government to manage the economy. Central Government also have a duty to protect local taxpayers from excessive bills.

I intend to publish a consultative document after the Easter recess setting out alternative approaches and dealing with these issues. At present, the Government have no intention to propose changes to the uniform business rate. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales will be making separate statements about the outcome of the review as it relates to those countries.

Let me summarise. We have already dealt with the burden of the local tax. I shall shortly publish consultation papers on structure, internal management and the new local tax. We will conclude the period of consultation in the summer. Depending on the outcome of that consultation, we intend to introduce legislation setting up the local government commission and providing for the new local tax in the next Session of Parliament. We anticipate that the first of the new authorities could be in place by April 1994. We shall consult local authorities on the basis that the new tax could be in place in 1993-94.

The proposals that I have outlined will establish a system of local government which will carry through into the next century. These proposals are designed to end the sterile quarrel between supporters of central and local government. They should attract men and women of sufficient quality and commitment to restore authority to and confidence in local government. They should enhance the quality of services and give extra momentum to the pursuit of value for money. They should result in a local government which puts people first. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): We have just heard the most complete capitulation, the most startling U-turn and the most shameless abandonment of consistency and principle in modern political history. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who cannot bear to be present, was famously not for turning. The Secretary of State and his new Prime Minister have not only turned; they have been through a revolving door. May we be assured that the new Prime Minister will not complain tomorrow that he has once again been bounced by this latest leak by the Secretary of State of his own proposals?

We have not heard from the Secretary of State a single word of contrition or apology. Will he now make a formal apology to the people of Britain for 12 years of arrogance, to local government for unprecedented chaos, and to millions of people who have been driven to despair by shattered services and unfair and ever rising bills? Is it not astonishing incompetence that, after 12 years in office and £13·5 billion of taxpayers' money, the Secretary of State still cannot tell us what he intends to do?

What happened to the Prime Minister's assurances on Tuesday that we would have all the answers this week? How could a Prime Minister on top of his job make promises on Tuesday which his Secretary of State is unable to fulfil on Thursday? Why are we left not with the answers but with the questions? Why have we not had answers to the most obvious questions? When will the charge take effect, what will be the valuation rate, how many people will be assumed to constitute a household, what will be the size of the poll tax element, and how many people will be losers?

Is not the problem that, while the Secretary of State clearly concedes that the poll tax flagship has been holed beneath the waterline, the wreck is still afloat and is a danger to all shipping? What the Secretary of State told us today, with its continued uncertainty and confusion, its inevitable doubts and delays, is in effect that the poll tax bills will keep on coming—this year, next year, in 1993 and in all probability in 1994 as well. Why will not he accept our offers of co-operation on a Bill to abolish the poll tax, on the basis of our fair rates proposals—the only way in which we can ensure that this year's poll tax bills will be the last?

Is it not clear that under the Secretary of State's proposals the poll tax will still be with us even after 1994? This is the tax that refuses to lie down and die. Under those proposals, will not people continue to be taxed simply because they live and breath? Are we not still faced with a head tax, with all the problems of a register, with all the unfairness of a flat rate tax, and with all the difficulties of extricating money from people with no income? Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that he cannot rely on the electoral register to solve his problems without putting a price tax on the right to vote and then inviting people to sell that vote at a price which may be as much as £150 or £200 per vote? Are we not left with all the objectionable features of the poll tax but with all the difficult and transitional problems of a new and untried property tax? Are we not faced with a pig-in-a-poke tax, a bed-and-breakfast tax, a property poll tax, a tax on the roof over one's head and a tax on the heads under one's roof?

How can the Secretary of State be confident of persuading his own party to support these proposals in the Division Lobbies? Does he recall the right hon. Member for Finchley assuring the country that she would never introduce a property tax? Does he expect her to follow him through the Lobbies? And what of himself and all his Front Bench colleagues—indeed, of the whole Tory party, all of whose members fought the last election on a manifesto commitment to abandon property taxes? Are they now to be whipped through the Lobbies—and how many of them will refuse to follow?

Are not the right hon. Gentleman's proposals for reorganising local government, vague as they are, also driven by the poll tax? Should not structure determine finance rather than the other way round? Why is the poll tax still in the driving seat, spreading its malign influence not just through education and through the whole of the Budget strategy but into the whole structure of local government, too? Are not this a Government who, despite their belated confession of terrible error, are still in thrall to the monster that they created?

There is, after all, some justice in the spectacle of the Government continuing to pay a heavy price for their poll tax debacle. The tragedy is that the rest of the country will also continue to pay that price—the price of a mistake borne of arrogance and perpetuated by a leaking and limping Government who, on the evidence of this broken-backed and blood-stained statement, are too weak and divided to correct their own error.

Mr. Heseltine: It will be apparent to the whole House that we have achieved more in three months than the Opposition achieved in 11 years. I repeat, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) who obviously did not hear what I said, that we shall consult on the basis that the new local tax will be in place for the year beginning 1993.

Let me return to the spirit with which we began this review a few months ago. The hon. Gentleman has criticised our proposals. I will make him an offer: I would be very happy to include his proposals in the consultative process that we are about to begin—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very heavy day ahead of us.

Hon. Members: Labour party Members are leaving.

Mr. Heseltine: I am not quite sure who is deserting the sinking ship, but I should like to help the hon. Gentleman a little more.

To conduct that consultative process with the thoroughness that the hon. Member for Dagenham would want, I need to know answers to some questions about the costs of the fair rate proposals. The House knows that, in the past few days, we have put £4½ billion into switching the incidence of responsibility from local people to the centre. The Labour party said that it would not have increased VAT to do that. What would it have increased? I need to know the answer so that I may consult thoroughly. If people need to know exactly who will pay how much, which is the complaint of the hon. Member for Dagenham, he must say precisely where he wants the tax burdens to fall. When the Labour party has worked out the answers to those questions, we shall have already won the next general election.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): If there are any apologies to be made in the House today, they should be made by the Labour party, which allows law breakers to sit on its Benches.

Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State be a little more precise about the equalisation arrangement to reflect property values between the north and south, and within the regions?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Obviously, we must address the equalisation problem in the consultative document. It is not possible to do so in general terms, but we must weigh up the various elements of the local tax before making a judgment. Some remarkable figures have been quoted as the likely consequence of our proposals for people living in the south-east, but they bear no relationship to reality.

On my hon. Friend's first point about the discrediting of local government, it is impossible to overstate the damage that has been done to the institution of local government by the behaviour of many Labour-run local councils.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Why has the Secretary of State chosen to move from the most unpopular local tax ever to the second most unpopular local tax ever? He has gone straight from the frying pan into the fire. We have not learned much about the new tax this afternoon, except that it will not be based on people's ability to pay, which is the clear characteristic of a local income tax.

Will the Secretary of State accept our welcome for the fact that his proposals on structure follow closely—even, in places, word for word—our proposals? Why does not he accept our whole package and recognise that fair elections for local councils, together with a fair tax, could make local government responsible and genuinely local?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much appreciate the conversations that we conducted with the Liberal party. They were in marked contrast to the wholly irresponsible position of the Labour party, which so lacked confidence in its proposals that it would not even discuss them.

We started our review in the hope that we could find a measure of agreement on the various aspects of local goverment. We have been able to meet with the Liberal party on some of the approaches that we have adopted and I have no ground for complaint about that.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not pursue the option of a local income tax as advocated by the Liberal party. There were several reasons, one of which was that the mood of the country means that it would not be inclined to want to entrust its income tax rates to local Labour-controlled authorities. Having listened to the hon. Gentleman at great length and with courtesy, I was persuaded not to follow his arguments, but to reject them.

Mr. Nicholas Ridley (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I support much of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the first part of his statement. However, now that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made a huge sum of money available to reduce the community charge, if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had put that money into improving the rebate system rather than reducing the total, might not the community charge have become acceptable in two years' time? The fact that my right hon. Friend has suggested a two-tax system that will be just as hard to collect as the present one, will not be related to ability to pay and will create a new class of losers might be simply because he decided to make his statement on the Ides of March.

Mr. Heseltine: As my right hon. Friend rises behind me, I do not think that anyone would suggest that he has a lean and hungry look. I very much welcome his support for the first part of my statement. To receive any agreement or support at all when dealing with the reorganisation and reform of local government is something of an achievement, so I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend suggests that we should have taken the hypothetical concept of allowing the community charge to run on, perhaps spending more and more money and underpinning it with more and more social security arrangements. That is not a credible basis on which to sustain a tax. First, the tax is widely perceived as not being as fair as was originally intended and hoped. Secondly, there are undoubtedly collection difficulties because of the significant number of changes during the course of a given year. Therefore, introducing a new, local tax that

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combines many of the elements of my right hon. Friend's ideas but also holds out greater certainty of collecting most of the money moves us towards an important consensus.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Is it proposed that the Government would give evidence, or make recommendations, to the local government commission stating which local authorities they would prefer not to continue?

Mr. Heseltine: It is unrealistic to think that the Government will not have an input into the analysis of something of this sort. I cannot think of any reorganisation of local boundaries in which, in the end, Ministers of the Crown are not involved. Everybody should have a wide chance to contribute to such matters. The hon. Gentleman should bear with me until he is able to read the details of the proposals and the consultative documents. In drawing them up, I shall do my best to listen to points put to me from all parts of the House.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does the Secretary of State agree with me that the Cassius's in this place sit on the Opposition Benches and that their skill lies in leading the electorate to their death? The answer proposed by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), when he was invited just now by my right hon. Friend to consult again, was a helpless response—"Abolish the poll tax, abolish the poll tax." He had no constructive proposals to offer the British electorate or the Government. I congratulate the Secretary of State on retaining the key element of the community charge, accountability to the local electorate, while bringing in the greater concept of a household service charge.

Mr. Heseltine: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for her constructive support. Nothing that we have heard from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) today can in any way be described as an answer.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): What will be the costs of collection for the new poll tax—because that is what it is? Will there still be a poll tax register, with people being forced to register as they are at present? Will not the costs be increased? Is this not the poll tax under another name?

Mr. Heseltine: I can understand the dismay of the Labour party and its attempts to suggest that this is a poll tax, but it is not. It is a local tax which is quite different in its concept and application. It is perfectly possible that we shall not need a register to administer the tax. But all those matters need detailed consultation with the local authority associations. I am absolutely amazed that, every time I suggest discussing the detail with anyone, the only party that goes through the roof with indignation is the one that does not believe in consultation and wants to impose its own wholly unacceptable views on everyone in sight.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on producing a system that will preserve the principle that every adult should contribute to the cost of local government, that will take account of people's capacity to pay, that will ensure collection—even from the most notorious evaders on the Opposition Benches—and that will, above all, keep down the cost of good Conservative local government?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend is as aware as I am that, on average, a vote for the Labour party puts £50 on the community charge. I welcome his support. We shall ensure that our proposals progress with the greatest dispatch.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): As VAT was increased by 2·5 per cent. on Tuesday, may we assume that the extra income will be allocated specifically to local government or to its particular functions? Will he confirm that each elector or ratepayer in Northern Ireland will benefit by £140?

Mr. Heseltine: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the courteous and helpful discussion that I had with him. He has made an important point. This was not an hypothecated revenue that the Chancellor described when increasing VAT by 2·5 per cent. The important point that my right hon. Friend made was that he was broadly creating a new balance between revenue raised from local sources and revenue from the central Exchequer. The single biggest change for which he was responsible was in the balance between the very substantial amount funded from the centre and the amount that will increasingly be funded by the local ratepayer or charge payer. We have begun to reverse the process that began in 1976.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who I am glad to see in his place, began the process of increasing the amount paid locally when he reduced central Government support. That reduction continued between 1976 and 1979 until my right hon. Friend the Chancellor brought about a significant shift.

On the specific question about Northern Ireland—it is important to shed light on the darkness of Opposition Members, even though it means a slight digression—these are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but the same proportions will apply in Northern Ireland.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I welcome the principles enunciated by my right hon. Friend as underlying the new form of local tax that the Government propose, and I recognise that much will depend on the balance achieved in the application of those differing principles, but I urge him to bear well in mind that what counts most in an area such as my constituency is the total demanded of residents by the local authority and the services provided in return for those moneys. Will he ensure that under the new system and structure of local government provision is made to regulate local authorities and greater power is given to the independent Audit Commission to ensure that real value for money is given?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's question. We are aware that the issue is one of detail when it comes to the introduction of the specifics of the tax. It is important to issue a consultation document so that local authorities, which must administer the tax, can participate in how it develops. We shall bear that carefully in mind. All right hon. and hon. Members will have a chance to consider the issues in principle before we draft legislation. I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend that, in many aspects of local government, the pursuit of value for money has not been taken sufficiently seriously. Our proposals will provide us with an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): In the midst of all the "interim", "in the future" and "after

consulting" proposals that the Secretary of State made, there was the certain statement that we would be paying the poll tax in the 1992 financial year. The right hon. Gentleman says, "We do not know what the figures are." Will he tell me the figures so that when I return to Leeds at the weekend I can tell people what the average three-bedroom house with two residents will pay after 1 April next year?

Mr. Heseltine: I have been as fair to the Labour party as I can be. Can the right hon. Gentleman conceivably answer that question in terms of the fair rates policy of the Labour party? Would it not be easier for him, in giving fair and dispassionate advice to his constituents, if he could compare our proposals with those of his party? I am offering the Labour party the chance to do that.

Because of the switch that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made in the Budget, we have brought down the contribution by local payers to such levels that it would be wrong for the right hon. Gentleman to indulge in scare stories in Leeds or anywhere else.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I am grateful that I caught your eye, Mr. Speaker, as I should have, being the Member who represents the area with the lowest community charge, apart from two London boroughs, which have heavy safety nets. Of course, my constituents will be pleased to have the extra money that my right hon. Friend concedes that they should have had from central Government. Will my right hon. Friend visit my constituency to find out how we produce value for money?

Mr. Heseltine: If my hon. Friend will come with me, I shall be delighted to attend upon her constituents.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I assure the Secretary of State that the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) is totally wrong in assuming that the longer the poll tax is in place, the more popular it will become. The people of Scotland have testified to that in opinion poll after opinion poll, as we were used as guinea pigs one year in advance of everyone else.

When considering how to change this tax, will the right hon. Gentleman advise the House what assessment he made of the possibility of having in a unit the size of Scotland a local income tax, based on ability to pay, which could have been implemented in the next financial year? We should not be held back until 1993-94.

Mr. Heseltine: Again, I thank the hon. Lady. She was courteous in coming to talk to us and in giving her views —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is embarrassing for the Labour party. I do not want to repeat my comments about the paucity of thinking behind the Labour party's views. All the other political parties joined our consultations, which were very profitable. We incorporated in the review many of the ideas which we discussed. A desperate bankruptcy exists, and it is to be found among Opposition Members.

We considered a local income tax, but we were not persuaded, for several reasons. First, within the totality of local government, entrusting local Labour authorities with setting the levels of income tax would have given them the power to reverse what was one of the main thrusts of Government economic strategy in the past decade. Secondly, in many local authority areas, where the number of income tax payers was relatively limited and the number of people on a form of rebate or exemption was high, the danger was that people with significant resources would be imprisoned in an area without having any effective control over the outcome of elections there. Adding a local income tax to a national income tax would create confusion in people's minds as to which function or service they were financing—whether local or central.

There were many complicating factors. We decided that a local tax formula would leave a clear idea in people's minds that they were paying a local authority which they could identify for local services.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that when a flagship becomes a navigational hazard the best thing to do is to scupper? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the professional way in which he has set about that job.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand something of my right hon. Friend's thinking, although I could never emulate his language.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The question directed to the Secretary of State by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was the first example I have ever witnessed of a Brutus stabbing a Judas. After 11½ years, local government has been reduced to absolute chaos and muddle by the Government's policies. What the Secretary of State has done today is to snatch chaos from the jaws of the poll tax defeat, and local government will suffer for it.

The right hon. Gentleman says that the commission that he is to set up will be able to consult local people and that if local people wish a certain form of government to be instituted, that will be allowed. If the people of Greater London decide that they want a strategic local government structure in London, along the lines of the old Greater London council, will the right hon. Gentleman allow that to happen?

Mr. Heseltine: Having listened to the hon. Gentleman, I am even more convinced than I was before of the dangers of such a proposal. If the hon. Gentleman were in my position, perhaps he would pause before accepting the advice of a former councillor from Lambeth.

Hon. Members: What about the Prime Minister?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): May I wholeheartedly congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing a system which will seem much fairer to the overwhelming majority of people in the country and which retains the important concept that most people will pay something? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, for the two years—or whatever period—for which the present system remains, he, and local authorities, will expect all those liable under it to pay, whether they are Opposition Members or people occupying less illustrious positions in society?

Mr. Heseltine: While I was listening to my hon. Friend's important question, I was conducting a further interim review of local government and, on mature reflection, I have come to the view that some councillors from Lambeth are really rather good people.

There can be no shadow of a doubt about the need to collect in respect of legitimate bills issued by the legitimate authorities of our local democracy. There can be no question about that and the utmost rigour should be

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applied in enforcing the law. Nothing makes that harder than the utterly unforgivable behaviour of those hon. Members who do everything in their power to undermine the process.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Does the Secretary of State accept that the most unbelievably arrogant part of his statement was his assertion that he would "improve the quality of local decision making"? That came from a representative of a Government the quality of whose decision making has so far cost us £13·5 billion. Will the Secretary of State assure us that any future assessment or review of the quality of decision making will include the quality of decision making in the Tory Government?

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman had spent even a tiny fraction of the time that my hon. Friends and I have spent consulting local councils, he would have discovered that what I said about the ability to manage local authorities and about the sort of people now attracted to them was not a party matter. Everyone is preoccupied about the problem of finding men and women with the time and resource to give to that vital part of our national life. By turning this into a party issue, the hon. Gentleman simply trivialises the debate.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): My right hon. Friend is to be commended on his unwavering determination to reform the structure, functions and financing of local government together, rather than—as in the past, with such unhappy results—separately. Certainly he will not get an atom of constructive help from the Labour party.

My right hon. Friend has not mentioned business taxation, although he did talk about a wider local government tax base. Will business taxation still be left out? Does he recall that a previous Secretary of State, during our debates on local business taxation, assured the House that close and intimate links between the local authorities and businesses in their areas would be reinforced?

Mr. Heseltine: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks. It is fundamental that, in the review, the structure, functions and financing of local government be linked. In my statement, I made it clear that the Government have no intention at present to make changes in the uniform business rate arrangements.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Has not the main cause of the suffering and turmoil in local government been the successive cuts in rate support grant —from 60 per cent. in 1979 to 42 per cent. today? The burden of taxation was switched from central government to local government so that the Government might take the credit for tax cuts, and the local authorities the blame for increased rates and cuts in services. Was not the purpose of the poll tax to sweep away Labour local government by imposing a large charge on everyone in the hope that the town halls would get the blame? The British people had too much intelligence to fall for that scheme. It backfired and swept away the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Is not the present commotion the sound of panic-stricken rats deserting the flagship?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening. The switch in resources, at the expense of the local payer, whether of rates or of the community charge, began in 1976 under the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). By 1979, the rate support grant had been reduced to 61 per cent. It is perfectly true that the change continued thereafter. Not until the Budget that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered on Tuesday was the direction reversed. The reversal is to be maintained at about the present rate.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of our constituents fully supported the principles that lay behind the community charge but thought that there were faults in the way in which it was implemented? People will feel that the proposals that he has presented in outline today meet the criteria and, at the same time, are practical. I congratulate him on his refusal to be pushed into presenting detailed proposals at this stage, and on his intention to put the matter out to consultation. That will provide the opportunity to ensure that, before matters are finalised, there has been proper discussion, that details have been worked out, and possible anomalies avoided.

Mr. Heseltine: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. We have tried very hard to adopt an evolutionary approach. The local tax meets certain criteria that are widely accepted, especially in the Conservative party. It is absolutely fundamental that changes of this sort be introduced following consultation with the people who will have to apply them. That is what we are doing, and we have no intention of allowing ourselves to be stampeded or forced to move faster than we think is compatible with proper completion of the job.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Can the Secretary of State tell us whether women with no personal income who stay at home to look after their families will be expected to pay the new poll tax, head tax, adult tax —or whatever he calls it—and whether the joint and several liability proposals will still apply?

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Lady waits until we have produced the consultation document, she will see the assumptions upon which it is based. There will, of course, be a rebate scheme associated with our proposals. As for the period between now and the introduction, in 1993, of our local tax proposals, we have no intention at present to change the incidence of the scheme.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) appears to have confused the Ides of March with the equinox—not that either appears to be particularly relevant.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on one aspect in particular of his excellent statement, and that is the proposal to introduce more unitary authorities, which has the great merit of making it easier for the taxpayer to identify excessive spending authorities. Is he aware that that is particularly relevant in Lancashire, where there used to be several county boroughs and where we now have an excessively spending Labour-controlled county council?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend represents his constituents extremely effectively because when I was in Blackpool not long ago I was left in no doubt about the depth of feeling there. I must not prejudge any local

consultations or recommendations of the local government commission, but I understand exactly the strength of feeling.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): In relation to the £140 per head subsidy for the poll tax mark 1, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is wholly unrelated to the demands on, or resources of, the local authority? If there is to be a subsidy for the poll tax in the current year, should it not be based on the principle, from each according to his resources and to each according to his needs? In relation to the poll tax mark 2, will the registration arrangements be substantially different from those obtaining now?

Mr. Heseltine: I have already said that it is possible in the new arrangements that a register of the sort associated with the community charge will not be necessary. It is a detailed and technical matter that must be looked at. We shall be putting forward in the consultation document a number of options—they are not firm proposals now—to deal with the matter because it is important, as I have said several times, that the local authorities become involved at this stage in advising on the most effective way forward. If the Labour party decides to end its ostrich-like silence, we shall listen to what Opposition Members, along with everybody else, have to say.

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): There will be great sighs of relief among my constituents in Lambeth as a consequence of the abolition of the community charge. Will my right hon. Friend please use his powers to cap the Lambeth budget, which is £8 million or £9 million above the £307 million allowed by the Government? On the other hand, will he urge his Department to be as sympathetic as possible over the back debt repayment due to Lambeth's inefficiency over many years? He must be aware that, of the present poll tax set by Lambeth, little over half is going to pay for the services of the council and the remainder towards the wretched debt accumulated by its inefficiency.

Mr. Heseltine: I am wholly in agreement with my hon. Friend. The new system that we introduce will, of course, be seen as a fair system, but it will also reflect the need for local authorities to bear down on their expenditure patterns. That principle will remain with the new system. It is worth saying that it is not just the community charge that the Lambeth authority does not collect. It does not collect the rents, and it did not collect the rates before the community charge was introduced. The most profound anxieties are developing about that local authority. They exist across the Floor of the House, and there are deep and justifiable concerns on the part of the Labour party because, after all, that party is in control there.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): In the muddle of criteria, platitudes and principles contained in the Secretary of State's announcement, he seemed to forget two principles that we used to hear from the Conservatives. The first was that one could not solve problems by throwing money at them—even though the Conservatives then threw £4·25 billion at the poll tax problem—and, secondly, that the Government had no money of their own because it was all taxpayers' money. Those two points seemed to escape the right hon. Gentleman as he tried to get out of the muddle into which the Conservatives got themselves.

Why does the right hon. Gentleman think it behoves Opposition Members to give him advice now when he was so well advised by us before he introduced the poll tax? We gave him advice on Second Reading, in Committee and on Third Reading of the measure which introduced the poll tax. He took no notice whatever of our advice. Why should we think that he will take notice of any advice that we give him now?

Mr. Heseltine: The more I listen to Labour Members, the more I wonder why I keep asking them whether they want to join the consultative process. Patently they have little to say. If I may offer a personal word of advice in commenting on the hon. Gentleman's welcome conversion to the view that one cannot solve problems by throwing money at them, it is lucky for him that there are so few of his hon. Friends left or he might be deselected.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Will my right hon. Friend accept that many of us are relieved that the new proposals which he has announced today will take account of ability to pay because that is a fair system which is essential to any new tax? Will he accept that I and many of my hon. Friends to whom I have spoken about the matter will do all that we can to unite the party and the people behind the proposals, which this time have been fully discussed and agreed within a united Government and a united Cabinet? In the review, will he pay particular attention to the peculiar way in which the community charge operated among our armed services, who were subject to whims of movement over which they had no control and who must be considered fairly in the new arrangements?

Mr. Heseltine: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the consideration that we have given to members of the armed forces. If I may pay a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Minister in my Department who has taken a particular interest in the matter, he has showed great concern for those who played such a conspicuous part in the Gulf. We must all be grateful to him.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) for referring to the fact that I have stressed ability to pay. My hon. Friend has taken a keen interest in these matters, and I am glad that he feels that what we have done today reflects his concern.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Bearing in mind that the Secretary of State referred to a £140 reduction, will he tell us how many people will get a reduction of less than £140 under the new system, taking into account the first transitional relief scheme, the second tranche of transitional relief and the fact that some people pay only 20 per cent.? Since the Tories have consistently told us that 11 million people are not paying the full poll tax, can the Secretary of State tell us how many will not get the reduction of £140 and whether some will not get anything at all?

Mr. Heseltine: All the hon. Gentleman has pointed out is how generous are the schemes that we have already announced. Of course, if we have given people benefits once, we cannot give them benefits again.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): May I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for listening to those of us who come from low-rated areas in the north-west for lifting the burden from us? May I thank the Secretary of

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

State too for giving county towns the prospect of running their own affairs, as my colleagues in Blackpool and all the other areas wish to do, so that we may have the opportunity of getting out from under Lancashire county council once and for all?

Mr. Heseltine: I welcome my hon. Friend's observations. The north-west is a particularly important part of the country and we have considered its problems carefully. Again, I am enthusiastic about the way in which my hon. Friend is indicating that there may be local interest in some of the changes that we have in mind. I am sure that she will play her usual active part in pursuing them.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Secretary of State is well known for wanting to get rid of the poll tax, and his Minister of State is well known for wanting to retain it. I am concerned, therefore, that when the Secretary of State was making his statement the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities was nodding in agreement.

It appears that we will get the worst of both worlds —a poll tax based on property. Can the Secretary of State tell me how the tax will be collected? Who will be responsible? Will each person be responsible for his own tax, or will one person in the property be responsible for the whole lot? As he is now keen on consultation, will the Secretary of State overrule his office and meet the leaders of South Yorkshire county council—the South Yorkshire authority—whom his office has refused to meet concerning a difference of opinion among his office, the Department of Transport and ourselves about the funding of the super tram?

Mr. Heseltine: We are in some confusion as to which authority the hon. Member has in mind, but we run an ever-open-door policy in the Department of the Environment and I am sure that we will bring our usual courteous attention to bear on any formal requests that we receive.

The hon. Member referred to the support that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities was giving to what I said during my statement. It would have been impossible—if I do not embarrass him in front of the Prime Minister—for any Minister to give more support to the Secretary of State than my hon. Friend has given me on this matter.

The hon. Member asked how we will collect this local tax. I said in my statement that there would be a single bill to the household; and that will be exemplified in more detail in our consultative document.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very anxious to ensure that all hon. Members who wish to put a question on this very important matter shall do so. I ask hon. Members, in view of the fact that many of the questions have been answered by the Secretary of State, to put new questions and perhaps single questions, and then all of them will be called.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I have never made a secret of my support for the community charge, but, as one who has the misfortune to represent a constituency in the ghastly overspending county of Humberside, may I tell my right hon. Friend that the structural reform proposals that he has announced today make his statement worth studying very closely with a view to giving it wholehearted support, not only on the structure but also on the finance? It is the structural reform as well as what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said on Tuesday which makes it possible now for us to get local government bills down for the people who have to pay them.

Mr. Heseltine: In the spirit of the day, I shall have to continue my consultations with my hon. Friend in order to be sure that he can give me wholehearted support later on.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not fair to say that what the Secretary of State has announced today is nothing more and nothing less than poll tax mark 2, insofar as it relates to the number of individuals in a household and will also call upon information held in the register of electors? Is that not the case?

Mr. Heseltine: No change is necessary in the basis of collecting information in any new system that we have in mind. No one has raised this issue as a problem in the course of designing it. No one has raised it with me as a problem in moving from the community charge to the local tax, so I have no reason to suppose that there is any problem that I must account for.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): As we have so acceptably slashed the burden of the community charge upon the charge payer, and as my right hon. Friend has so courageously decided that we could get rid of county councils if the local authorities wanted, some of us are left wondering why it is necessary to introduce a complex property tax which most of us have spoken against for the past 20 or 25 years. Will my right hon. Friend give some assurance that refusal to pay this tax, which might be branded as uncollectable, will not be a reason for withdrawing it in due course?

Mr. Heseltine: I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will feel that, as the last question but one referred to it as a poll tax and he sees it as a property tax, it may be that I am entitled to insist that it is a local tax and cannot be defined in any of the neat packages that are being used so to do. I believe that it will be seen as a tax which complies with the principles that I have set out, which means that most people will pay towards it, it will reflect people's ability to pay and it will be seen as fair. It is in no way capable of being described by either of the labels put on it.

What I have said today is not a prescription for getting rid of counties or districts; it is to look at the administration of local government on the ground and come to a view of what makes sense.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State realise that, ever since he first became Secretary of State for the Environment, local government has suffered greater difficulty and its ability to deliver quality services has been reduced? Is he aware that this review will further prejudice the ability of local government to work properly and that it will reduce the confidence and the professional expertise of those who are professionally involved?

When the Secretary of State says that the 22 per cent. and the means of obtaining it will be reviewed, does he

include by definition the poll tax or "head" element, or would he permit other ways of raising that relatively modest 22 per cent. of tax?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not identify the figures that the hon. Member gave from what I have said. If he has any further exemplification that he wants to put to me, perhaps he will write to me and I will try to deal with it. I cannot accept for a moment, however, that what I have proposed will do other than enhance the possibilities and prospects for local government. In all seriousness, my Ministers and I have spent an inordinate amount of time, with great pleasure, talking to councillors of all political parties who have put to us a remarkable consensus of view on what should be done; and it will not serve the best interests of local government if the Labour party now tries to besmirch the opportunities that we are determined to achieve.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend's statement will receive a warm welcome in my constituency where it will be widely seen as promoting a fair system of providing local government finance, in particular, his assurance that properties in the south-east will not be disproportionately disadvantaged because of high value. Will he take it from me, however, that there is a disproportionate disadvantage to business properties in the south-east which were revalued at a time of historic highs in trading and where the UBR has had a disproportionately large impact?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can reaffirm our clear awareness of the imbalances that are thrown up by capital values between one part of the country and another. When we publish our consultation document, my hon. Friend can rest assured that we will address that issue directly. We are also quite aware that there have been changes in valuation since the initial uniform business rate valuations. There are proposals for a regular revaluation process, but I would be very surprised if we have not seen a restoration, at least in substantial part, of the values of south-eastern property by the time we get to that point.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that, as long as everyone in the household has to pay the same amount of money minus any rebate, it will be totally unacceptable? Why is it that the Secretary of State and, indeed, the Cabinet have responded to those members of the Conservative party in the House of Commons who clearly want to keep the poll tax, as has been indicated this afternoon, instead of listening to the overwhelming number of people who time and again have said that they want no poll tax, mark 1, mark 2, mark 3 or anything else? Is it not clear that when the elections come —the May local government elections and the general election—the British people will reject the mark 2 poll tax as they have rejected the mark 1 tax?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that the hon. Member will do his best with wholly inadequate arguments to put that case forward, but he will find that it is not very successful, particularly as he will have to explain how his own party is proposing to go to one system of local government finance in one year and then tear the whole thing up and go to another in the following year. He will also have to explain how his party will finance both those systems when it has rejected the proposal of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to put £4·25 billion into the system.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in south Staffordshire there will be few tears for the poll tax but many cheers for the courage that the Prime Minister and he have displayed? Is he further aware that as long ago as 1974, when the Labour party was in office, our right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was co-sponsor of a Bill which would have introduced the sort of system that he is now advocating and which would have saved us a great deal of aggro?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will not expect me to go too far back in history. When dealing with local government, history has a way of rearing up and smiting one. I thank my hon. Friend for the tribute that he paid to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has unquestionably played the decisive role in bringing about the conclusion that I have announced today.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The Prime Minister said on Monday night that the poll tax was uncollectable because so many people were not paying it and the courts were overloaded. Does the Secretary of State realise that, despite the rout today and on Tuesday, in the words of a saying, it is not over until it is over, and it is not even over then? There are 15 million people in Scotland, England and Wales facing prosecution, the threat of bailiffs or the threat of gaol and the Secretary of State has said nothing about them today. Unless that threat is lifted and compensation is provided to the millions of others who went into debt to try to pay the poll tax, he will find that those numbers will increase from 1 April and that the flagship of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) will be his Titanic.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I made express reference to that point, and the answer is clear. The law is the law and bills have to be paid.

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent proposals. Will he bear in mind the reprehensible behaviour of authorities such as mine in Birmingham, which, in setting the new poll tax level, incorporated the Government's transitional relief of 65 per cent. and £25 extra to allow for non-payers of the present rate, making the total £150 higher than the Conservative proposals? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the non-payers are brought to heel as 50 per cent. of them have followed the advice of Birmingham city councillors about non-payment and are council employees?

Mr. Heseltine: I share my hon. Friend's concern. Perhaps he will share the dilemma of the Secretary of State for the Environment, who knows that the irresponsible behaviour of Labour councillors is an every-day, inbuilt definition of the job that he does.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Does not the Secretary of State think that keeping the poll tax in 1992-93 as well as in 1991-92 is totally unacceptable? Does he have so little confidence in his hybrid tax that he has to keep the poll tax that extra year? If by any horror the Tories should win the

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

next general election, what is to stop the headline figure for the poll tax for 1992-93 soaring again? Is not the poll tax still the curse of the undead?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not follow my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's statement. He made it clear that he intends to preserve in subsequent years the balance that he has struck for 1991-92. Of course that will not deal with overspending local authorities. It will deal with Government support and maintain it at the same levels as have been broadly outlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but if local authorities choose to overspend it will still leave bills of unacceptable levels for the local community.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether we should move faster. The practical solution is that there is no way of moving from where we are today in a quicker time scale than that I have outlined. That is why the Labour party is prepared to inflict on local government two different systems in two consecutive years.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us supported the community charge because of the unfairness and inequality of the old rating system? I feel sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that it is absolutely right to hold further discussions with the people who thought that the community charge was unfair. Let them give their views as to how we can make the new tax fairer. Let us hear their views before we settle into another system.

Mr. Heseltine: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. We have considered this matter carefully in Government and have decided that there must be a degree of certainty about our intentions. That is why we have announced that our new local tax will be in place, hopefully, by 1993-94, which we believe is the earliest practical time that that can be achieved. I wholly accept my hon. Friend's point about the unfairness of the old rating system. That is one reason why one is utterly aghast that the Labour party wants to bring it back.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that he has cut a sad and sorry figure today? He has looked and sounded like an old-style ship owner with a leaky old tub on his hands who is not sure how much longer it will stay afloat, how much longer passengers will be willing to pay, how much he is willing to charge them or how he will count them on board. I appeal to the Secretary of State and, more importantly, to the Prime Minister to ease the grief and misery of the British public, sweep away all the commissions, consultative documents and discussion papers and let the people of Britain have a general election so that they can choose between the Tory poll tax mark 2 and Labour's fair rates plans.

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman is pressing my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to hold a general election so that the electorate may be better informed, I am sure that he will press his right hon. Friends on the Front Bench to provide the basic information needed to enable a proper judgment to be made about the relative merits of both systems.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I thank my right hon. Friend and his colleagues for the care and thoroughness with which they conducted the consultations before bringing forward today's proposals. I also thank my right hon. Friend for taking into account the fact that many of us believe that there were not only serious defects in the rating system and the community charge but that by avoiding those and incorporating the better part of those two systems the proposals are likely to command widespread approval in the House and outside. Will my right hon. Friend be reassured about the effectiveness of his statement by the looks of frustration and disappointment on the faces of Opposition Members?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has made a discerning observation about the Labour party. It might feel that one of its arguments had disappeared out of the window.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): In setting out his proposals for the longer term, the Secretary of State said that most people should make some contribution. Until now the Government have insisted that everyone must pay at least 20 per cent. Who will be exempt in the future, and why cannot those categories and individuals be exempt now?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not followed the way in which the community charge works. The 20 per cent. was, in large measure, reimbursed through the social security system for those on full benefit.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. I represent a constituency where average house prices in relation to average incomes are much higher than in most parts of the country. Will my right hon. Friend pay special care and attention to the need to ensure that in those circumstances the new system of local taxation will be fair and reasonable?

Mr. Heseltine: I assure my hon. Friends that we are fully aware of the regional disparity in capital values and the need, therefore, to address that specifically. It will be in the consultation paper. I would go further than that. Like everybody else, I keep an eye on what is reported in the newspapers. I have seen figures quoted for the effect of the proposals that we have in mind for certain parts of the country, principally the south-east, which bear no relationship to reality.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will there be a new poll tax register for the new poll tax, or will the electoral register be used? Different answers have been given to different Opposition Members. It will be a disgrace if the electoral register is used because it will be a direct tax on electoral registration, and that would concern us all. Even with a separate poll tax register, last year 600,000 people were missing from the electoral register. Will the Government produce figures for the position this year? The problem is that these proposals are simply an attempt to have something to say in a general election.

Mr. Heseltine: I have answered that question several times. I said that under the new system we shall not need a register. I have made that clear. Answers to such quesitions will be clear in the consultation document.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will receive a broad

welcome, not least because of the proposed review of structure and functions? Does he agree that the unitary authorities of the 32 London boroughs provide a good example of successful structures? Does he also agree that it is necessary to consider the functions of local government expenditure, especially with regard to national services such as the police and fire services?

Mr. Heseltine: I am glad to respond to my hon. Friend. The unitary model in London is preferable to that which existed before, especially for the large urban conurbations. There is no question but that the Government's decision to get rid of the Greater London council, the metropolitan counties and, later, the Inner London education authority has been a remarkable success. It clarified matters and saved money and jobs. That is important. In the context of the review, I do not think that we intend to make further changes to the structure of the London authorities. However, the functions that they perform and their internal management would be included in the consultative process that I have described.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that, had the rate support grant remained at its 1978-79 level, the current poll tax would not be £250, as is proposed, but £150? Are not the Government the biggest robbers from local government funds? The record of the Government's attack on Labour-controlled authorities dates back to the Local Government Act 1972, which was the first to cause chaos, to the attack on the metropolitan county councils and on the GLC, all of which were Labour controlled and all of which were abolished because of a political vendetta carried on by the right hon. Gentleman and his cronies. What safeguards will he provide to ensure that the local government commission will not be a Tory quango with the sole aim—secretly, behind closed Whitehall doors—of abolishing Labour-controlled authorities?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman should not tempt me. The idea would not have occurred to me if he had not put it into my mind. Having considered it—albeit briefly—I reject it. As is customary, the independence of the commission will be secured.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only as a result of the introduction of the community charge that local spending was put under the spotlight by encouraging all members of the community to analyse the quality of services and the calibre of councillors? I have no objection to any of his proposals because they marry two systems. Had he not retained an assessment of the number of people in a house but reverted to the archaic system proposed by the Opposition, this would be an old-fashioned party. I welcome the fact that he will continue to consider carefully the internal workings of local authorities. If not, there could be no guarantees of value for money. We must consider contracting out the management of housing and education. If my right hon. Friend wants evidence of poor housing management, will he please come to Wolverhampton? I could fill a book for him.

Mr. Heseltine: It looks as though I shall be busy visiting my hon. Friends' constituencies, which will be a great pleasure. I support what my hon. Friend said. She has particular expertise in internal management systems. I agree that that issue has not been considered for too long, but it will be considered in the consultation exercise that we have promised today.

My statement reflected my agreement that we must move further and faster towards the concept of enabling authorities to offer choice and have competition and to see the vast baronies of power moved from the public sector to a more competitive sector. The idea of marrying two systems by reflecting the number of people in a household was always one of the preferred ingredients of the package from the earliest days of our review.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): How will the Secretary of State's announcement affect one policy which especially concerns the public and which local authorities are already trying to implement—community care?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for asking that question. The Government have announced their plans. Local authorities know the timetable, and nothing that I have said today changes the Government's known position.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): This is today's shortest question: can we have Rutland county council back, please?

Mr. Heseltine: I am tempted to say, "If you want it", but I must be allowed to define "you" in a very wide compass.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Much of the Secretary of State's statement was taken up with setting up consultations and commissions to rectify the actions taken by the Government since 1979 and the reorganisation by the previous Tory Government of 1970-74. The words that he used to commend the sanitised version of the poll tax—poll tax 2—were similar to those used to commend the original version. Why should the people of Burnley, which is Labour controlled and has a low poll tax, and the people of Ribble Valley, part of which I represent, which is Tory controlled and has a high poll tax, have confidence that the Government have got it right? How much has this sorry saga cost the nation over the past two years?

Mr. Heseltine: The people of Burnley may like to consider the level of expenditure in the Labour-controlled county council of Lancashire. That might colour their view. The verdict in Ribble Valley is that we shall have a Tory Member of Parliament there after the next election.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall do my best to call hon. Members. Will they please ask brief questions?

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Since most questions have already been asked, besides welcoming the excellent statement, may I ask my right hon. Friend about local government reorganisation? Does he intend to give greater powers to parish councils, especially on planning matters? May I also ask about privatisation and contracting out? Does he envisage the contracting out of planning departments and their architects and planners?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend asks two interesting questions. I have no plans to change the present regimes of the parishes. I do not wish today to be drawn on the

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question of contracting out planning departments, but there are some interesting ideas about how they could be changed.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I welcome my right hon. Friend's recognition of the strength of the unitary authorities and the essential factors of comparability between authorities and accountability. If a consensus emerges for the assessment to be based on capital values, will my right hon. Friend consider carefully the idea of capital values being based on rebuilding costs rather than on market values? That might help to smooth out things across the country.

Mr. Heseltine: I am aware that there are many ways of assessing capital values, one of which is by reference to building costs. I ask my hon. Friend to wait for the publication of our consultative document, which will set out a range of options. We can then hold detailed discussions.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): On the structure of local government, my right hon. Friend will be aware that in an interim report the Boundary Commission has already decided to recommend the abolition of Humberside county council. When the final report is published, can he assure my constituents in east Yorkshire that that will suffice to get rid of the county and that it need not be re-examined?

Mr. Heseltine: I fully understand my hon. Friend's eagerness. However, he will understand that I am in a difficult position and that I cannot comment on his question.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Given the enormity of his task, may I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on coming forward so quickly on the restructuring and refinancing of local government? If my right hon. Friend listens for a moment, he will probably hear the cheers ringing out from Cleveland at the echo of the fact that that authority is about to go. In the meantime, may I ask my right hon. Friend to watch carefully the activities of that local council? It is currently spending £680,000 on a brainwashing exercise for the people. The council may try to spend similar sums over the next two or three years to save its own rotten neck.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend, as a former local authority leader, has a great insight into the things which local councils occasionally get up to. I am sure that he would not have played any part in such things himself.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on the Government's approach to local government reform? It will compare favourably with some of the more lunatic proposals for regional government and the like being peddled by all the Opposition parties. On local government taxation, does my right hon. Friend understand that many of us still feel that the burden being imposed on local government is too great? Having started the shift from direct local government taxation to indirect, centralised taxation, will he confirm that he will not preclude the possibility of continuing that process in the course of his consultation?

Mr. Heseltine: It would be only realistic of me to tell my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been more than generous. He has not only made a significant shift, but he has committed himself to preserving broadly the balance that has been struck. It would be unrealistic to imagine that that will be changed.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations, especially on the earlier part of his statement in which he rightly identified the cause of the problem to be the uncontrolled appetite of local government for more spending? We now face the problem of how to curb that. Will he assure us that he will pay special attention to the true alternative to the community charge—which, incidentally, will be mourned by my constituents who thought that it was a valiant attempt to do the right thing about local government? The alternative is to consider whether services need to be provided by local government or whether they could be carried out more effectively through a competitive marketplace.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises important issues. I wholly support what she says about the need to control spending and to get value for money. It is possible to marry together the provision of local services by enabling authorities with the fact that they do that by contracting out services.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Although I readily acknowledge that this afternoon my right hon. Friend has made great progress in the reform of local government finance and structure, may I assure him that in densely populated counties, such as Berkshire, there is a great desire for unitary authorities? Unitary authorities mean boroughs and districts, and not counties.

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for stressing the popularity that could flow from the concept of unitary authorities. We must now wait until we have a chance to test that in practical terms on the ground.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On the concept of a property tax based on capital values, will my right hon. Friend explain whether the general principle is that a family of three on average earnings living in a £200,000 house would pay twice as much as a family of three on average earnings living in a £100,000 house? Will he also explain what on earth will happen to water rates if we move from rateable to capital values? Will we now pay for our water on the basis of how much the house is worth?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will know that we have in mind over a period to move away from water rates, and the water companies are now considering that matter. It is for the complexity of reasons to which my hon. Friend has drawn our attention that the Government have decided not to adopt a property tax.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there will be a wide welcome in Portsmouth for the opportunity once more to run its own affairs 100 per cent. in Portsmouth rather than having to rely on Hampshire county council—and the sooner the better for Portsmouth?

Mr. Heseltine: I must dampen the enthusiasm of some of my hon. Friends who already assume that we shall set up the local government commission and shall make

judgments such as they wish to see within a short time. We must go through a proper process of local consultation once we have set up the commission, and we must test people's mood of what they want.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will metropolitan authorities be included in the review, given that the unitary principle for local government has been working well in metropolitan authorities, despite Government attempts to sabotage it? Will he give a commitment to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that the current metropolitan authorities at borough level will continue after the review?

Mr. Heseltine: In reply to an earlier question, I said that I did not anticipate changing the structure of the metropolitan authorities.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement today will be seen as good news by the majority of the British people? They will see his proposal as a far fairer method of funding local government. His statement, which included a reference to the fact that local people will be able to choose the form of local authority that they prefer, will also be widely welcomed. What impact will his statement have on rate-capped authorities such as Warwickshire?

Mr. Heseltine: I have explained our position on rate capping for the current year. I have no changes in mind as a result of anything that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor or I have said during the past two days. I have explained clearly that we shall look for restraint in local authority expenditure next year, especially in view of the considerable additional money which has been put in to reduce the community charge to its lower level. To ensure that, we shall have to anticipate the rigorous use of capping powers.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My right hon. Friend deserves great praise for coming forward with a system that should answer many of the points of unfairness that are perceived in the present system. One of the flaws of the present system is the seeming inability to control local authorities that seem hell-bent on levying at a rate greater than they should. Capping has proved an imperfect instrument for achieving that control. There are some councils—regrettably some are even Conservative—in which the councillors seem to be incapable of resisting the money-spending propensities of the officers who run them. Will it be possible to bear those factors in mind in the review?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The awfulness of some of the high levels of expenditure is that they often go hand in hand with some of the least effective deliveries of services. There is no doubt that the capping regime has had its effect and that it will be a necessary part of our controls as we introduce our new system.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his proposals for consultation with local people about the future of their local government. On the local tax, will he tell us whether he is taking fully into account the cost and the whole operation of valuing properties with the consequent disputes, appeals and fluctuating values, which will have to be taken into account? Will he keep his ears open to alternative suggestions, such as the measuring of property, which would be a far simpler and more accurate way to deal with the matter?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend begins already the process that will flow from the publication of the consultative document. We have ideas, and colleagues may feel that some are rather more effective than the necessity to value every house precisely, although that is one option that we must consider. However, I do not wish to be drawn on that today in advance of the consultative document on the options that we are about to put forward.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): My right hon. Friend will know that the devil is always in the detail. He will not be surprised to know that in a low-spending area such as south Dorset people were pleased when the community charge was sold to them on the basis that they would pay 25 per cent., business would pay 25 per cent. and the Government would pay 50 per cent. They were less pleased when they found out that they were paying 45 per cent., business was paying 45 per cent. and central Government were paying 10 per cent. My right hon. Friend has announced today that the local tax percentage will be about 22 per cent. Will that apply to people in south Dorset, or will they subsidise people in other areas? Can my right hon. Friend, as the Minister responsible for England, assure the House that English local taxpayers will pay the same percentage as Scottish and Welsh local taxpayers?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend represents a beautiful part of our country. He will realise that other areas have wider and sometimes deeper problems. Therefore, there are equalisation processes and the figures that I have given are average figures from across the country. That will remain the position. There will be a variation within those, depending upon the characteristics of the local areas.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the poll tax has been intensely unpopular in Ipswich, among most of my constituents, and that there will be widespread rejoicing at the comprehensive and well-merited butchery job that he has done on it this afternoon? However, while the unfairnesses of the poll tax have been resented, there has also been a widespread acknowledgement that the old domestic rating system was unfair. One of the great merits of the proposals that my right hon. Friend has announced this afternoon is that they are directed towards putting right the unfairnesses not just of the poll tax but of the old domestic rates system.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right to remind us of the unfairnesses of the old rating system, to which the Labour party is now committed. However, I would not accept the graphic language that he used in describing me as having been involved in a process of butchery. I feel that I have been curing the joint.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on seemingly retaining some elements of the community charge and on giving a welcome added impetus to the need to contract out more local government services. When he publishes his consultation document, will my right hon. Friend clarify which of the different criteria that will now have an effect on what a household pays will be more important? In other words, will two

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people living in a house worth £100,000 pay more than four people living in a house worth £50,000, all other things being equal, or vice versa?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will immediately recognise that that depends entirely on the weight that we put on the two elements of the new local tax. This will be one of the many matters about which we shall be consulting. I support what my hon. Friend said about contracting out.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Did my right hon. Friend hear the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), say on Radio 4 that he expected that the natural drift of the reform of local government would be to the district or borough councils? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that will be good news for our borough councillors as they go into the borough council elections? Does he understand that, with 43 county councillors, 64 borough councillors and 29 parish and town councils on the Isle of Wight, my constituents will be ticking off the days until 1994? Can he confirm that it is no accident that he promised us that the new system will be in place by April 1994, just before the county council elections? County councils have been the pick-pockets of community charge payers throughout this whole transaction.

Mr. Heseltine: I have had the privilege of visiting my hon. Friend in his constituency, and those points have been put to me on earlier occasions with equal eloquence.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I understand that it is the Secretary of State's birthday. I hope that he has happier birthdays in future. I apologise for blowing out his candles.

Does the Secretary of State understand that, in announcing that he has rid us of the poll tax and in telling the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that he is not adopting a property tax, he has invented a hybrid donkey tax which stands on sand and is kept alive by being fed carrots? The Secretary of State has suggested this afternoon a tax that he is not willing to spell out, a tax without a valuation system, and a tax that retains the 20 per cent. contribution, some form of register and the proposals for water metering while not solving the basic problem of ability to pay.

Will the Secretary of State concede that any new valuation system will take at least two years to implement from the day that legislation is completed? That means that, if the Conservatives stay in office, apart from those who live in Wandsworth and Westminster—the only people who have seen their poll tax abolished—the country will have to suffer the poll tax until April 1994. We will suffer the chaos, the cost and the confusion for the simple reason that the Government refuse to accept our fair rates proposal because they are hooked on the idea of numbers rather than on income and fairness and are determined at all costs to get through the general election before announcing what they mean to do.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has raised matters that have been covered exhaustively in the past two hours. I can only say that, if he thinks that his system will stand scrutiny alongside ours, I am happy to compare them detail by detail. I am happy to put his system to the local authority associations for their views so that it can be compared with ours. The hon. Gentleman and the Labour party talk as though we have caused chaos for local government, but I can think of nothing more likely to do that than to introduce two totally different systems of local government finance in two consecutive years. That Labour party policy is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in its own right, but when its plan means that one of those years will see a return to the discredited rates system, it is doubly unacceptable.

I do not confirm that a valuation should take the time envisaged by the hon. Gentleman. Valuations can be carried out much more expeditiously, and we will discuss ways to do so in the consultation document.

The overwhelming view of the House has been a broad welcome for what I have announced today. It has given local government a new sense of opportunity. We are determined to build on that and to develop it. I commend our proposals to the House.

No Confidence Motion

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the wake of the statement that we have heard, I take this opportunity to give notice to the Government and the House that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are today tabling a motion of no confidence in Her Majesty's Government. It is:

"That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government in the light of their inability to rectify the great damage done to the British people by the poll tax."

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): That will have been heard by the Leader of the House, who is in his place.

Further Education

5.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about the Government's plans for the reorganisation of further education in England.

We are determined to achieve better standards throughout the education service. The national curriculum is improving teaching and motivating young people in schools as never before. Parental choice is being exercised in more and more schools. A new and clearer system of vocational qualifications is beginning to open up exciting opportunities for school leavers. The proportion going on to higher education has nearly doubled since this Government took office, but we still lag behind our competitors in the participation of our school leavers in further education and training, and their achievement of useful qualifications.

I believe that the further education colleges have a vital role in providing education and training for both school leavers and adults. They have never in the past been given the attention that their importance in education policy should justify. Through links with business they are well placed to provide the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. The Education Reform Act 1988 has given them greater managerial autonomy and they are recruiting more students, but they are still subject to bureaucratic controls from local authorities. They lack the full freedom which we gave the polytechnics and higher education colleges in 1989 to respond to the demands of students and of the labour market. The polytechnics are demonstrating quite spectacularly the gains in increased student numbers and increased efficiency without any loss of academic standards that can be achieved with full independence.

The Government therefore propose to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to form a new sector of post-16 education from April 1993, by taking all further education colleges offering full-time education and all sixth form colleges out of local authority control. They will be funded directly by the Government, through a council appointed by and responsible to me. The funding regime will consist of a basic annual budget together with an element dependent on the numbers actually enrolled. It will be designed to provide a powerful incentive to recruit additional students and reduce unit costs. The further education colleges will also assume responsibility for some adult continuing education.

Spending by local authorities on further education colleges and sixth form colleges in England currently totals over £2 billion of current spending and £100 million of capital. That will become central Government spending with a corresponding reduction in grant to local authorities.

The colleges will work closely with the training and enterprise councils. The Government attach great importance to the developing partnership between TECs and other local interests in education and training. We have already given TECs specific responsibilities in work-related further education. They and the new independent colleges will have much to gain from close co-operation. The colleges will own their assets and employ their own staff. They will provide for an

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ever-increasing proportion of our young people the preparation they need for their working life in the rest of this decade, and in the 21st century.

I have a duty to ensure that the interim period before the establishment of the new independent sector is as smooth as possible. We must place the interests of the student first and ensure that the work of colleges continues undisturbed. I intend to give the right of transfer of employment to the staff of the colleges that will form the new sector.

I intend to vest the institutions, which I propose will be free-standing corporate bodies, with the land, buildings and plant which they currently use. I intend to seek Parliament's approval in the legislation that I shall introduce for a measure which requires my specific consent for all disposals by local education authorities of land or interests in land, including buildings used or held or obtained for or in connection with the purposes of the institutions.

I am concerned that from now on local authorities should not enter into new contracts which bind the colleges beyond 1 April 1993 when they begin to manage their own affairs. Such contracts should be entered into only with the specific consent of the governing bodies of the institutions affected. Contracts for a consideration having a value in excess of £50,000 will in addition require my consent. The forthcoming legislation will seek Parliament's approval to a measure with this purpose. I shall also seek Parliament's approval for appropriate sanctions where consent has not been obtained in advance.

I shall seek Parliament's approval for these transitional measures to have effect from midnight tonight. In this way, I intend both to put beyond any doubt the long-term future of the colleges and to enable the transition period to be as smooth and trouble-free as possible. I am placing further details of these measures in the *Official Report*. My Department will write to all LEAs to explain how these measures will be applied.

These developments will still leave much of the education of young people with school sixth forms. I assure the House of my determination to see good sixth forms continue. Whether under local authority control or in the grant-maintained sector, proposals for the opening of new sixth forms and the closure of existing sixth forms already have to come to me for approval. I shall use the powers available to me to ensure that sixth forms thrive, and to encourage choice between schools and colleges wherever possible.

This new sector of education will have a great deal to offer our young people. Indeed, it is the education and training of our 16 to 19-year-olds which will be at the heart of a White Paper which will come jointly from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and myself in due course. That White Paper will contain further details of the proposals that I have just described. I believe that the proposals will be widely welcomed by all sections of the community, especially those which have always sought to further the interests of further education in Britain. I commend the proposals to the House.

Following are details of the measures:

The Government propose to introduce legislation this autumn to form an independent sector of post-16 education fromApril 1993. All further education colleges, maintained or assisted by a local education authority, offering full-time education, including tertiary colleges, and all sixth form colleges, that is maintained schools which normally provide education only for pupils who have attained the age of 16, will be taken out of local authority control. They will be funded directly by the Government through a new council appointed by and responsible to the Secretary of State. New sixth form colleges and further education colleges, including tertiary colleges, which are established after this announcement will also be funded through the new council, including any grant-maintained sixth form colleges.

Institutions in the new sector, apart from volutary sixth form colleges, will be free-standing corporate bodies, and will be vested with the land, buildings and plant which are currently used by them. I intend to seek Parliament's approval to legislation which requires the specific consent of the Secretary of State for all disposals by local education authorities of land or interests in land, including buildings, used or held or obtained for or in connection with the purposes of the institutions. I shall seek similar powers to ensure that the LEA's interest in any land, including buildings, used or held or obtained for or in connection with the purposes of a voluntary sixth form college are not disposed of without the specific consent of the Secretary of State and that the LEA conveys its interest in these to the trustees of the school.

The disposals of land or interests in land requiring the consent of the Secretary of State will include outright sale, granting or otherwise disposing of any leasehold or other interest in land, direct sale and leaseback, any mortgage or other charge designed to raise capital on the security of the land. It will also include any disposal which is made in return for the supply of goods or services. In referring to disposals I include entering into any binding obligation to make a disposal of the kind in question.

To ease the interim period before the establishment of the new sector, I am concerned that local authorities should not enter into contracts which bind the colleges beyond 1 April 1993 when they begin to manage their own affairs. Such contracts should be entered into only with the specific consent of the governing bodies of the institutions affected. Contracts for a consideration having a value in excess of £50,000 will in addition require the consent of the Secretary of State. The forthcoming legislation will seek Parliament's approval to a measure having this purpose.

I shall also seek Parliament's approval for appropriate sanctions where consent has not been obtained in advance. With the disposal of land or interests in land without the consent of the Secretary of State, there will be a power of compulsory purchase with a right of recovery from the local authority of any compensation payable. In the case of contracts, including contracts for disposal, entered into without the consent of the governing body concerned or, where applicable, the consent of the Secretary of State, there will be a right of repudiation, and such repudiation will be deemed to be a repudiation by the relevant local authority, so that any liability in damages will remain with the relevant local authority.

I shall seek the approval of Parliament for these two measures to have effect from midnight tonight. This statement does not affect enforceable obligations entered into before midnight tonight.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): As the timing of the statement so exquisitely demonstrates, the Secretary of State's announcement has been motivated by nothing whatever to do with the needs of the education service. Instead, it has simply been dictated by the Government's blind poll tax panic. The right hon. and learned Gentleman comes to the House this afternoon not as Secretary of State for Education but simply as the Environment Secretary's subordinate.

The whole House will be delighted that the Secretary of State has at last noticed, after 12 years of Conservative government, that

"we still lag behind our competitors in the participation of our school leavers in further education".

That is a major admission by the Secretary of State of 12 years of Conservative failure—12 years in which the share of Britain's national wealth devoted to education has fallen, while almost all our major competitors have invested more and have had far better results in their education and training services.

Is not it typical of this Government that, faced with the yawning education and training deficit between the United Kingdom and its major competitors, the only solution that Ministers can find is to set up a centralising bureaucracy, establish a new national quango and deny local people both a voice and choice? The Secretary of State could adduce no evidence whatever to back his claims of a lack of responsiveness to the needs of 16 to 19-year-olds among either further education colleges or local education authorities. The problems that colleges and LEAs have faced were imposed on them by central Government and central Government alone.

Does not the Secretary of State realise that the major problems in increasing opportunity and choice at 16-plus are educational, not bureaucratic? Does he realise that there is an urgent need, as Her Majesty's inspectorate said, to end the jungle of qualifications, with over 200 examining boards for those between 16 and 19? Does he realise that instead we must establish a coherent, unified system of 16 to 19 examinations? The statement said not a word about that. Instead, the Secretary of State has blighted all chances of sensible reform of examinations for those between 16 and 19.

Does not the Secretary of State also understand that there is the widest support for setting clear national and local targets for improvement in participation rates for 16 to 19-year-olds, as the Labour party has proposed? That sensible reform, backed by both the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress, has been rejected out of hand by the Secretary of State's friend, the Employment Secretary.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, despite what he says, his proposals will place school sixth forms at risk and in financial limbo, with less financial support than sixth forms in further education colleges? What will be the position of both church schools with sixth forms and voluntary-aided sixth form and further education colleges? What guarantees does the Secretary of State give about the future of adult and community education, especially where that provision is contained within existing further education colleges?

Although one understands—especially in view of his record in the health service—the Secretary of State's profound contempt for those who are locally elected to represent their communities, and his desire to place all institutions under quangos appointed by him, what planning or strategic role will local education authorities have in respect of planning 16 to 19 provision?

Nothing has caused greater resentment or loss of efficiency in the education service or greater unpopularity for the Government than piling one hasty and impulsive change after another on the service. Has anyone told the Secretary of State that the last major changes in further education took effect only 11 months ago and have yet to be established? Those changes were made under the Education Reform Act 1988 and, in commending them to the House, the former Minister of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), praised the work of local education authorities. Given the ghastly mess that the Government have made in education and on the poll tax through impulsive decisions taken without proper consultation and consent, would not it be sensible for the Secretary of State to consult those who run 16 to 19 education, those in colleges and schools and the public, before seeking to ram these ill-considered and hasty proposals through the House?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friends and I have been working for some time on these further education proposals and I commend them to the House for education reasons. I have met principals of further education colleges who have pressed me to be allowed to have the independence from local government that we are now giving them. Our proposals will be widely welcomed in the world of education, especially by those in further education colleges, tertiary colleges and sixth form colleges which concentrate on 16 to 19-year-old provision.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) comes in as a little Sir Echo from our debate on the previous statement and tries to imitate his colleagues in their exchanges on the poll tax when he should be addressing the education issues that are involved. When he goes outside he will find that my proposals are welcomed by those in education whose advice he should heed.

Secondly, I am not taking anything under central control, but I am taking colleges out of local government control. The body that we are setting up is a funding council which will distribute the funds and will bear in mind quality that is assessed as I have described. It will otherwise leave the management of the colleges to themselves. Colleges will be free to spend the money and the funding regime will ensure that they increase the participation of students and improve their efficiency at the same time, exactly as the polytechnics have done.

That is modelled on the freedom that we gave to polytechnics in 1989. Polytechnics are not controlled centrally by me, although funds are distributed to them by a funding council. Polytechnics are brilliantly successful in increasing the participation of students in higher education, and we have seen 36,000 more students this year alone. They are at the same time increasing efficiency and maintaining excellent academic standards. Therefore, removing from local government control those responsible for higher and further education institutions which want to be entrepreneurial and to expand opportunities for young people is a good education policy which the hon. Gentleman should not oppose.

The hon. Member for Blackburn made rather strange remarks about funding having more to do with this. He knows that we spend a higher percentage of our GNP on education than do most of our competitors, and that spending per pupil in this country has gone up by 40 per cent. He was right in what he said about the jungle of qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds. We are already addressing that with the help of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications which we have set up. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and I are closely addressing that matter and some of the others that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. We shall shortly produce a White Paper setting out better opportunities for young people which will include further clarification of qualifications.

I have already said that I shall use my powers to protect sixth forms and certainly good sixth forms which are of benefit to the schools to which they are attached. Parents

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would also like to have local choice of sixth forms. Voluntary-aided sixth form colleges will be affected by my proposals. They will acquire the new status and join the new sector and I have today written to people in the churches involved to set up a way to have discussions about the mechanics.

Adult education presently carried out and delivered by colleges will also be covered by the proposals and the funding arrangements that I have described. Details on that will be contained in the White Paper. My statement should be addressed by the hon. Member for Blackburn in his capacity as spokesman for the Opposition on education matters. If he addresses it objectively and uses educational judgments, he will welcome and commend my proposals.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will reject the unfounded allegations by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a serious point of order, not an attempt to interrupt the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

A written statement was issued to hon. Members when the Secretary of State started to give details of his proposals. The Secretary of State said that from midnight tonight he would take certain action to prevent local education authorities from entering into arrangements with further education colleges. In the written statement issued to hon. Members, the Secretary of State says that he will not seek legislative powers to do that until the autumn. That seems to pre-empt a decision of the House in relation to the Secretary of State taking powers. Is it in order for a Secretary of State to implement proposals from midnight when he has no statutory right to do so and will not have such a right until the legislation is passed by the House in the autumn?

Mr. Speaker: I am concerned with what the Secretary of State has actually said, not with anything that may have been written.

Mr. McCartney: This is serious, Mr. Speaker. I am speaking about what is contained in the written statement that accompanied the oral statement by the Secretary of State. He has said that from midnight he is implementing proposals which will be contained in legislation in the autumn. As I have said, that pre-empts a decision of the House and I seek a judgment from you, Mr. Speaker, on the powers under which the Secretary of State proposes to do that. Is what he is doing ultra vires, because the House has not given him the necessary power?

Mr. Clarke: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. What I have announced is well precedented. My statement had to contain details towards the end about what I proposed because I was announcing to the House that certain measures would take effect from midnight tonight and that I would later seek parliamentary approval for those steps. That was done when polytechnics were given independence and it is frequently done for changes in taxation and for changes in regimes of this kind. It is to make sure that from midnight tonight local authorities will not be tempted to strip assets, sell land or enter into contracts.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tony Banks: (Newham, North-West): We still have six hours to go.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend knows, I am stone deaf in one ear and therefore do not have a clue about what he said.

Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) raises an important issue. The Secretary of State tried to wriggle out of it by saying that his action is well precedented. It is precedented only by actions of this Government when they introduced retrospective legislation.

Mr. Clarke: Taxation.

Mr. Straw: This is not about taxation. The suggestion that local authorities will asset-strip further education colleges to which they are committed and have expanded and are up and running is absolutely preposterous. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should withdraw that. It shows his hostility to local education. Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that no parliamentary approval exists for the Secretary of State's proposal?

Mr. Speaker: It is a matter for the Government. If they are found to be ultra vires, it will be a matter for the courts, but it is certainly not a matter for me.

Mr. McCartney: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not trying to delay matters but this issue is vital to the good running of the House and to you, Mr. Speaker, as the defender of the House. The Secretary of State has had two opportunities to indicate what powers under what Education Act he is taking upon himself to carry out certain actions after midnight. Clearly, he has no precedent in law. I do not want to see the Secretary of State before the courts next week arguing with education authorities about their proper and rightful duties in respect of colleges. Perhaps we need an adjournment and some discussion behind the Chair about how to proceed in this matter or we will find ourselves——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McCartney *rose*—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] What a bunch of louts. I apologise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I must say to the hon. Gentleman that what the Government intend to do is a matter for them. I repeat what I have said to Front-Bench spokesmen that whether the matter is ultra vires is a matter for the courts, not for me.

Mr. Tony Banks: Jack-booted thugs.

Mr. Speaker: We would be well advised to keep the temperature down. I do not know who said that, but I shall allege that I am temporarily deaf.

Mr. Pawsey: I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will reject the unfounded allegations by the hon. Member for Blackburn in the same way as the House will reject the vote of confidence motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that when we set colleges of

further education free from local education authorities they will be able to blossom in exactly the same way as polytechnics?

Mr. Clarke: I have certainly been assured of that by many of the principals of further education colleges who have been pressing us to make precisely this change. Given their head and the right financing regime, they will have every incentive to improve their efficiency, extend the range of their courses and, most importantly, attract an ever-rising proportion of our 16-year-olds into further education.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Once again the Secretary of State has managed to remove an element of local democracy without, as he admitted himself, tackling the problems of confusion or underfunding in this sector. Can he confirm that local people from whom power has been removed will see no financial benefit, as it is his intention to achieve the change entirely by removing Government grant without allowing any fall in local spending? Conservative Members who have argued for the centralisation of education are now faced with a measure of that centralisation, but with none of its expected benefits.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain to local people how they are to fare in future? In Truro, for instance, there is a proposal for a tertiary college on which we had expected a decision by the Minister next week. How are we to proceed? Is everything to come to a grinding halt until the Minister has published the White Paper and passed the legislation?

Mr. Clarke: The management of local further education colleges and polytechnics was not usually directly affected in the past by local democracy. They were not at the heart of the red meat of local politics—indeed, the sector was sadly neglected. Tertiary education achieves a great deal, but it has never attracted the degree of attention that it deserves. The test of whether it is anti democratic is to talk to some of the principals of the polytechnics. So far I have not found any lecturer in or principal of a polytechnic—including a number of the classic left-wing, bearded variety—who believes that it is a good idea to go back to local government control. Such people have been liberated by the change and have acquired, not lost, freedom. That is what will happen to colleges under my proposals. In the White Paper we shall deal with the details of how new colleges are to develop, but I expect that we shall adopt a system in which the funding council will make proposals of that sort to me.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend looking to members of the training and enterprise councils automatically to become governors of colleges of further education? Will he confirm that the choice facing an upper school now is to stay with the local education authority, to opt to become grant maintained, or to opt to become part of a college of further education?

Mr. Clarke: The answer to the first point is certainly yes. I would expect a member of the local TEC invariably to become a member of the governing body of these institutions. We are not talking about opting for the new status, because at the moment schools under local authority control can opt for grant-maintained status—although curiously further education colleges do not have that choice. So they do not have a natural constituency that we can ballot; their populations are more transitional; so the parent body is not so closely connected with them.

My announcement today means that all further education colleges, all tertiary colleges and all sixth form colleges will transfer to the new sector and be independent of local government from April 1993.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The real danger of the Secretary of State's proposals is that they will entrench the division between sixth form FE colleges and sixth form colleges. The flaw in our secondary education system has always been the divide between the academic and the vocational, and these proposals will deepen that divide. We need to train all our young people together in a system in which vocational work and academic work are equally respected. This change will be destructive and will further entrench the divide.

Mr. Clarke: I assure the hon. Lady that I share her concern not to deepen that divide. My colleagues and I are working to ensure that vocational education acquires the same status as academic education, so that there are no artificial divisions between them. Sixth form colleges will enter the new secter as a result of my announcement. They tend to concentrate on traditional academic courses, so many of the young people in the colleges that I am talking about will study, for instance, for A-levels; but many others will be doing vocational courses. I do not believe that she is correct to suspect that the proposals will widen the divide.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Will not my right hon. and learned Friend's statement represent a further enhancement of this important sector of education? Might it not also be an important step towards ensuring the universal involvement of 16 to 19-year-olds in some form of education and training?

Mr. Clarke: In our forthcoming White Paper we shall deal with the whole issue of how to increase participation by all 16 to 19-year-olds in some form of education or training. We shall set ourselves the aim of greatly increasing such participation. I share my hon. Friend's aim, and I trust that our White Paper will measure up to his expectations.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): Although I am persuaded that further education colleges will be better off independently funded than subject to the vagaries of local authority control, does the Secretary of State agree that there is a great danger in the proposals that local education authorities reconsidering the structure of their sixth form and 16 to 19-year-old provision will automatically turn their backs on the tertiary college or sixth form college solution in order to retain control over the education of this age group?

Mr. Clarke: If there is a risk of that it will show that the local authority in question is motivated more by a desire to keep its empire intact than by a desire to improve educational opportunities for young people in its area. I rather share the hon. Lady's fear that such councils exist—I encounter such attitudes frequently when I receive applications for grant-maintained status from schools. We shall have to consider ways in which the new funding council can make proposals to us for opening new colleges

[Mr. Clarke]

in certain areas. A council that was neglecting to create more choice in its area might find that the new sector was beginning to offer parents some choice in that district.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I hope that I did not detect in one of my right hon. and learned Friend's answers that he is falling into the trap of beardism—that would be unfortunate and discriminatory. As a recent governor of a college of further education, may I say that it was crystal clear that it would be extremely desirable to do exactly what my right hon. and learned Friend has done—and that I welcome it. When he looks into the funding arrangements, will he ensure that the rundown state of much of the capital stock of these colleges is taken into account?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support, which is based on his experience. I am sure that he is not the only governor to have thought that colleges of this sort have been comparatively neglected by local authorities that attach far higher priority to other parts of the education system.

I take note of what my hon. Friend says about capital. Many of these colleges' revenue and capital have been comparatively neglected; we shall consider capital arrangements and probably again use the funding council as our agent to distribute the necessary capital investment.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Will the Secretary of State hesitate before proceeding rapidly on this course until he has considered the view that many people, bearded or otherwise, may express? It is that there is likely to be an excess of centralisation and a greater degree of bureaucracy. Whatever he may say, there will certainly be great anxiety in successful sixth forms. Will he subscribe to the view that education has suffered in recent years from undue turmoil and an excess of dogma?

Mr. Clarke: The universities receive their funds from the Universities Funding Council and are not centralised under the control of central Government. The polytechnics and higher education colleges receive their funds from a funding council and are not under my control or over-centralised. The same will apply to the new sector. The desirable pattern for education is not detailed control by either local or central government. More power should be devolved and delegated and responsibility for and control over funds go to those who work in the institutions themselves and serve on their governing bodies. That is the pattern that we are following.

The hon. Gentleman says that we should not rush into it, but it is necessary to make an announcement and to outline the provisions that will come into effect from midnight tonight simply to ensure that certain local authorities do not start apostating. We have much experience—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is protesting but his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) should know that we had to take that measure when the Greater London council began to take similar steps immediately after we announced that we would abolish it.

We are still sorting out problems in the case of the polytechnics. Only a week ago I met a principal who said that his local authority had accepted that the polytechnic now owned the building but still insisted that it owned the grass in front of the building. Such disputes exist throughout the country. Had we not made such arrangements, I am sure that great pressure would be put on many colleges to enter into long-term contracts, binding them to their local authority, and their assets would be clawed back into local authority control. All the tricks of the trade, which many local authorities know only too well, would be used to keep their bureaucratic empires intact.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals. Ealing's higher education college is doing well independently of the local authority, which has been a perfect nuisance to it in the past.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State follow through the logic of his statement and consider the position of school sixth forms? Would not it be right for high schools and secondary schools to have arrangements made for them similar to those that he has announced for non-advanced and advanced further education and tertiary colleges?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that the opinion of those involved with Ealing higher education college is shared by everyone in higher education colleges that have been given their independence. Whereas at present we are offering to secondary schools, including those with sixth forms, the opportunity to seek grant-maintained status, the first step is that the local management of all schools will be placed in the hands of the governors and the head teachers shortly, with 85 per cent. of the schools' budgets under their control by 1993. Beyond that, the best will rapidly move to full grant-maintained status, with 100 per cent. of their budgets under their control and comparative freedom and autonomy from local authority control.

Thus, a parallel course is already set out. The pace at which schools are choosing grant-maintained status is accelerating at a remarkable rate, even in the few months that I have been in office.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Secretary of State accept my party's welcome of the proposal for a White Paper on the 16 to 19-year-old sector? Will he also accept that there will, indeed, be wide-ranging support from those who work in the further education sector in England and Wales—similar proposals will be made by the Welsh Office—and that the funding council will provide an opportunity to combine central funding with flexibility of institutional control in the locality rather than control by the aldermanic tendency, which still exists in too many local authorities? In what ways does the Secretary of State intend to enhance the relationship of adult and continued education with the further education sector? What relationship does he see, if any, between the new funding council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and the Universities Funding Council to improve access from further education to the rest of higher education?

Mr. Clarke: First, I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome. He was a lecturer in his time, although I think it was in higher education, so he is knowledgeable on the subject. His opinion will be shared by professionals in education. As he rightly anticipated, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will

make a statement because there will be a separate Welsh funding council and arrangements for Wales which I am sure he will welcome.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked about adult education and access from further to higher education. Those matters are important and we are working on them as part of our White Paper. We shall address those problems directly when we return with our White Paper and our proposals for opportunities for young people of that age across the board.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his statement will be widely welcomed in the further education sector, not least because it has been calling for precisely that measure? Those who work in that sector will not understand the Labour party hostility to the proposals. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one reason why his proposals are right is that the Government's funding of further education has not always been passed on by local education authorities to those institutions? At long last, it will go to them directly. Will he confirm that this is the clearest possible sign of the Government's commitment to the further education sector and its role in education and training?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right —we have had experience of approving capital for projects in further education, only to discover that when the local authority has obtained the capital approval for such projects the money was not spent in that sector. That shows the practical application of the way in which many colleges have been neglected vis-à-vis the schools sector. I agree that many people in further education will not understand why the Labour party has a blind commitment to keeping up the widest level of local authority bureaucracy and is instinctively hostile to a move that has been demanded by most people in further education for many years.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): How can students and staff have any confidence in their courses in view of the experience of many people now on employment training courses who are being given less than a week's notice of the termination of their courses, ahead of time, as a result of the advent of training and enterprise councils, which the Secretary of State wants to make responsible for running colleges of further education?

Mr. Clarke: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment assures me that arrangements are being made for people to continue their courses. The introduction of the TECs, which I warmly welcome, is not having the consequence that the hon. Gentleman fears.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): My right hon. and learned Friend is well aware of the valuable service of the Workers Education Association, not only in Nottinghamshire but in our rural communities. As he also knows, it had a raw deal from Nottinghamshire county council this year as regards funding. Will he assure me that it will be taken into consideration under the new funding arrangements?

Mr. Clarke: I have every possible reason for agreeing strongly with my hon. Friend's criticisms about Nottinghamshire county council's disgraceful behaviour this year. As I said, my announcement comprises certain responsibilities for adult education and we shall outline them in more detail and explain the funding regime when we produce the White Paper. The funding of adult education, especially that which is closely related to career opportunities for people of that age, must be protected. We shall take it into account when drawing up our new arrangements.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): When opening his statement, the Secretary of State emphatically said that the arrangements were for England. In replying to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), he said that the Secretary of State for Wales would make a separate statement on further education. However, in the order of business, I understood that the statement was on local government finance. Are we now being told that the Welsh statement will be on poll tax mark 2 and further education in Wales?

Mr. Clarke: Wales and Scotland have devolved government. As an English politician, I can never understand the constant controversy on devolution in both the other countries on the United Kingdom mainland. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is Education Minister for Wales and my writ does not run there. Similarly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland deals with education in Scotland. Their statements will cover both local government finance and further education.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. and learned Friend point out to the House, especially to the Opposition, that on 11 June last year I brought a delegation from the Isle of Wight art and technology college to see the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold)? The college principal and the governor-chairman urged my right hon. Friend to take that action because they were so fed up with the political shenanigans of the Liberal Democrats who have continually cut the budget and politicked with the courses at the college of art and technology. My right hon. and learned Friend's statement will be widely welcomed by the tutors, governors and students on the Isle of Wight. Taken together with the training enterprise councils, it marks a breathtaking revolution that will do us well in 1992.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for helping to mobilise representations to the Government which led us to take that decision. Several other such representations by my hon. Friends led us to our conclusions. As my hon. Friend made clear, had we not experienced difficulties with the community charge, and were we not changing the basis for local government finance, I am sure that I should have wanted to come before the House with a statement to rescue further education from the vagaries of people such as the Liberal Democrats on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I remind the Secretary of State that at 3.30 pm the Secretary of State for the Environment announced major changes in local government structures, and said there would be a consultation period. However, within three hours, the Secretary of State for Education and Science comes along to the House and makes announcements that will radically affect local government structures and responsibilities. Education is one of the most important local authority functions. How dare he do that and talk about democracy?

[Mr. Tony Banks]

He comes here like Hitler with a beer belly and says that changes will take place. Exactly what consultations are taking place with local education authorities on those proposals? As he is saying that legislation will be presented to the House in the autumn, does that mean that we are not going to have a June election?

Mr. Clarke: I am confident that educational opinion will support me, and any consultations carried out by the hon. Gentleman would confirm that. I prefer to base my judgment on the educational interests of colleges, not the advice of the hon. Gentleman, who clung like a limpet to his little chairmanship and little power in that completely useless organisation the Greater London council. It was a big car and a big platform for making statements, but he had no powers or responsibilities. Quite a few other spheres of local government would do well if subjected to the sort of scrutiny that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has said that he will give local government in the near future.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I can fairly confirm the attitude of one further education college to my right hon. and learned Friend. Recently, the principal and a majority of the governors of Kingston college of further education said that they thought they had been ill done by when Kingston polytechnic was allowed to become free-standing.

May I press my right hon. and learned Friend further on the subject of adult education? He will realise that much of it is conducted in the same buildings as further education. Will the whole or part of further education move out of local education authority control? What about accommodation?

Mr. Clarke: The colleges will continue to make provision for adult education, and the extent to which they do so has been encompassed by my announcements today. We will in due course address the detail, which will certainly include the funding arrangements for that essential part of adult education, preparing young people for their careers. I agree that it forms an important part of our proposals; we shall give more details in the White Paper.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does not the Secretary of State for Education and Science understand that these measures will be seen as accelerating the disintegration of the unitary system of education, which was introduced by a national Government and agreed to by all parties in the House in 1944? Will not it also mean that there will be three different types of institution competing for the education of 16 to 19-year-olds? What is the approximate proportion of local education authorities' current expenditure on education that the Secretary of State expects to be transferred by these measures? Do not the proposals mean that all existing sixth form colleges will achieve grant-maintained status by law? Were these proposals contained in the last Tory election manifesto?

Mr. Clarke: I will not debate the history with the hon. Gentleman, but the system of education that grew up did so rather by accident. The Education Act 1944 did not even impose a duty on local education authorities to provide schools. It was a matter of chance that they grew up as they did. We reached the position where every school was under the detailed, day-to-day management of local authorities—some good, some not so good and some bad. My preferred method of management is one that distributes the money by a fair method and retains some ability to monitor standards, but puts the day-to-day responsibility firmly in the hands of the principal, head teacher or governing body——

Mr. Straw: That is there already.

Mr. Clarke: That is now being described as "fair" by the hon. Member for Blackburn, who has gone through one of the quickest conversions on policy for a long time.

As for the proportion of local government spending, £2 billion will be affected by my announcement today. Off the cuff, I believe that the total local government spending on education is about £17 billion. Those who have successfully reached the right standard according to the school curriculum will rapidly be able to work out what percentage that is.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): When making this welcome statement my right hon. and learned Friend was right to ignore the advice of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), whose asset-stripping instincts were in keeping with the old activities of the Inner London education authority, which laid to waste academic standards throughout London.

The statement is particularly welcome to me. My right hon. and learned Friend knows that Esher sixth form college in my constituency was already considering applying for grant-maintained status, which shows that the system has been running longer than the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) suggested. That sixth form college was worried that it might have been alone, if it were one of the first and only ones to have applied for grant-maintained status. The proposals give a structure to post-16 education which is extremely welcome. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will now turn his attention to items such as inter-authority transfers, which sixth form colleges thought worked badly against them when attracting pupils from out of their areas.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend's sixth form college will no longer be unique in its independence, but I am sure that it will be one of the best in the new sector. The problem of inter-authority transfers and their financing will disappear almost completely. The financing of the colleges will depend, first, on core funding, based on planning and judgments of quality by the funding council, then on their success in attracting young people from wherever in the surrounding area to come to good quality courses. That is a much better way of financing the expansion of colleges such as that in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor).

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of the Labour party's passionate defence of ILEA, that singularly useless and unlamented education body that used to control London. The only Labour education policy is the defence of bureaucracy and the dead hand of local government on the day-to-day management of schools.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the Secretary of State answer the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) about whether the proposals were contained in

the Tory party manifesto at the last election? The Secretary of State has no mandate for what he is doing here today. There is something sinister about a Government who take power away from people in local democracy and put it under the Government's jackboot. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), I think that the Secretary of State is like Mussolini, who was Hitler with a beer belly.

Mr. Clarke: I look forward to the next Labour party manifesto to see whether it contains a commitment to hand back polytechnics and colleges of higher and further education to local government control. If such a promise appears in the next Labour party manifesto, I promise the hon. Gentleman that he will face deputation after deputation of lecturers and pupils demanding that the policy should not be carried out. It is symptomatic of the way in which many of the left-wingers with whom I have to deal in local education authorities behave. When their arguments fail, they resort to personal abuse, a level to which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has finally sunk.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend about administrators and advisers who exist within the education departments of county councils? How will he ease the passage of reducing their numbers, which must clearly be done if their responsibility is taken away? After the removal of polytechnics from the control of education authorities, how many advisers and administrators were saved? That is a serious question and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will answer it. I know that Dorset county council already has some worries about losing various schools that want to opt out and reducing the burden of those administrators. Nothing will be saved unless those administrators move elsewhere or sell their services, thus taking the burden of expense away from the local taxpayer.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The changes that we have made, and the steady change to enabling authorities, gives local authorities the opportunity greatly to reduce their central staff, thereby reducing the burden on the community charge payer. I cannot give an off-the-cuff answer on Dorset, but the numbers of advisers should be reduced as a result of the decision that I have announced. Local education authorities are large enough to redeploy those people as they move from those duties. Far too many local authorities do not adequately reduce their central administration, even when they lose responsibilities. I shall not comment on Dorset—it is far away—but my local authority shows signs of having grown like Topsy for many years. Nottinghamshire combines extravagance and sometimes incompetence with poor supervision of its education services.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Does the Secretary of State recognise that the most important element of his statement is the acknowledgement that after 12 years of this Government we still lag behind other countries in education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds? Does not that show the Government's failure in providing for our young people?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that his statement will cause much anxiety among schools that have sixth forms? How will he use what he called his "additional powers" to protect and secure the future of sixth forms?

What is likely to happen to free-standing adult education centres? The Secretary of State did not refer to adult education centres in his statement, but in response to a question he said that they will be included under the funding council. Is that the intention, is the right hon. and learned Gentleman mistaken or must he obtain that information from the Minister of State? If so, will he give it to the House?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that adult education, which is important to thousands of people, will be put at risk by the statement and by the Government's approach to funding?

All hon. Members recognise the need for a statement on an integrated approach to the education and training of 16 to 19-year-olds. It would have had more credence if the Secretary of State had made that statement first and the institutional reforms had flowed from it, but the education arguments are to be advanced second and the institutional arguments to be made first. That is final confirmation and evidence that the statement is not about education but about the chaos that has been created by the poll tax.

Mr. Clarke: The proportion of our young people in higher and further education is increasing dramatically. I agree that we are behind many of our competitors, but we are catching them fast and making up for past deficiencies in the service. The number of students in polytechnics and higher education colleges is 54 per cent. higher—more than half as many again as when the Government took office.

I expressed the importance that I attach to keeping good sixth forms and to giving parents the choice of a good sixth form where possible. My existing powers will enable me to protect sixth forms because any proposal to open or close one will continue to need my consent and because we can bear in mind the needs of sixth forms when constructing the standard spending assessments in the equalisation measures necessary to distribute grants to local authorities. We can thereby consider the weighting to be given to post-16 pupils.

I did not say that adult education colleges—free-standing institutions that deliver solely adult education—would be covered by my statement, but that the adult education responsibilities of an FE college would be considered. The details of the provision for adult education were addressed in the White Paper, and nothing that I have announced will diminish the opportunities for adult education.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) came near to welcoming the proposal of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and myself for a comprehensive statement of policy on 16 to 19-year-olds. He is quite wrong in believing that my announcement today is inconsistent with such a statement. As I keep pointing out to him and to the hon. Member for Blackburn, they are obsessed with the structures. It is extraordinary that they are most shocked by the idea that colleges should be taken away from their friends in local government. The people about whom we are all concerned will benefit from our giving colleges the independence that I have announced today.

Local Government Review (Wales)

6.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on local government in Wales.

The Government have already explained to the House our new arrangements for further reductions in community charges. The people of Wales will be delighted to know that, although average charges in Wales were substantially lower than elsewhere in Britain, I have been able to secure exactly the same reductions as those offered to English and Scottish charge payers: Welsh charging authorities will reduce all charges by £140, and Wales will receive £300 million in additional resources.

The remarkable consequence is that, taken with my announcement last January on the community charge reduction scheme, the average charge in Wales before the award of community charge benefit will be £95. As nearly £1,170 per charge payer will be spent by Welsh local authorities in the forthcoming year, it is an astonishing good deal for Wales.

We abolished domestic rates and we intend, from the earliest possible moment, to abolish the community charge and replace it with a new local tax that will be linked to two essential elements of a household—the number of adults, and the value of the property. I propose to consult in Wales on the basis of that proposal. I should make it absolutely clear that I am prepared to consider a system whereby the balance between the two elements—the property element and the element attributed to residents —may be different in Wales from that elsewhere. That balance, and other matters, will be the subject of consultation. I look forward to receiving the views of hon. Members, among others, and I very much hope that the Opposition can be persuaded to make a constructive contribution to the debate.

I have received representations from Opposition Members and from the local authority associations that we should move towards a system of unitary authorities in Wales. I can see some advantages in such a structure, but before I could commend any new system to the House I would need to be satisfied that whatever is proposed represents the best deal possible for the people of Wales.

In reaching conclusions on that matter, I must pay particular regard to the views of the local authority associations. Both associations have pressed on me the case for unitary authorities, but as yet there is no agreement between them on the appropriate size or number of authorities. I have suggested that they should seek to establish common ground on the future structure of Welsh local government. I am therefore pleased to hear that they will meet on 5 April to consider that further, and I have informed the chairman of each association that I shall not reach final decisions until I have had the benefit of further discussions with them following that meeting.

I should, however, like to make two further points. First, community councils play an important role, especially in rural areas, and I shall need to consider the merits of any proposals for change. Secondly, I shall consult on how the decision-making process of local authorities can be improved. I shall try to build on the excellent work that Welsh authorities are undertaking with the efficiency initiative.

We must look at the problems of finance, functions and structure together. No institution, even one as important as local government, can remain unchanged for ever. I shall consider whether the present range of local government functions is appropriate and what should be the balance between central and local responsibility.

In that context, I can tell the House that I intend that the further education and sixth form colleges in Wales should become independent from their local authorities from 1 April 1993. The legislation which we will introduce for Parliament's approval will provide for the colleges to become independent corporations, owning their own assets and employing their own staff.

The colleges play a vital role in producing the well-educated and well-trained labour force which Wales needs. They will work closely with the training and enterprise councils. The colleges could, however, increase their contribution still further by recruiting more young people to their courses. The proposals which will be set out in the White Paper to be published shortly will give further details of how that can be achieved.

I intend establishing a Wales funding council through which the colleges will be funded. The council will be appointed by, and be responsible to, me. It is my intention that the land, buildings and plant currently used by the colleges should be vested in them on incorporation. The arrangements which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has said will be included in the legislation requiring local authorities to obtain specific consent for the disposal of assets currently used by the colleges will apply to local authorities in Wales; so too will the measure he referred to preventing local authorities from entering into contracts which bind the colleges beyond 1 April 1993. As in England, these measures will be effective in Wales from midnight tonight, subject to Parliament's approval of the legislation.

Further details of these measures are in the statement which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science placed in the *Official Report* today. My Department will write to all local education authorities in Wales to explain how those measures will be applied.

It is now in the interests of the whole of Wales that we create a lasting framework for local government to provide high-quality services effectively and efficiently. That is a goal to which we can all aspire.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The Prime Minister said on Tuesday that we would get the details today, but the outcome of the Government's four-month review is a statement of dithering, delay and indecision. We still have no details or answers. Today's statement simply leaves Wales with many questions. How will the new system work? Will it be fair? How much will it cost? Will it improve local accountability? Will it improve local democracy? Will it improve the standard of local services? People in Wales do not just want a reduction in their bills; they want the poll tax to end. The statement will not give them that. In effect, the poll tax lives on.

Does the Secretary of State remember criticising the Labour party at the Conservative party's annual conference when, referring to the Labour party, he said:

"The party that loves tax wants two taxes to replace one, a twin tax torture for local people and a double disaster for responsible spending"?

Does not the statement in some respects show that the right hon. Gentleman has gone for a triple tax torture—a property tax, a 2·5 per cent. VAT increase and a poll tax? Again, the poll tax remains for the people of Wales.

The right hon. Gentleman boasts of the huge sums of money which he is throwing at the problem of the poll tax, but are not the Government bribing the people of Wales with their own VAT money? Is it not incredible to hear the right hon. Gentleman seeking plaudits for lessening the poll tax pain when he himself approved that hated tax? Did he not gain promotion to Cabinet by his devoted service to the poll tax? Never before in the history of local government in Wales has a Minister presided over such chaos.

Swansea city council has sent out 145,000 poll tax demands; Ceredigion council has filled its vaults with tens of thousands of printed, and now useless, demands; and our capital city of Cardiff has sent out its poll tax demands. This shambles invites nothing but contempt from the dedicated professionals in the Welsh local authorities, and the Secretary of State must carry responsibility for this chaos. I know of no Welsh Office Minister who has presided over such a humiliation. Is not an apology owed to the people and councils of Wales? I ask the right hon. Gentleman to give that apology here and now.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned structure and functions. He proposed consultation with local authority associations. That will create bitterness. I issue the right hon. Gentleman a warning: do not tamper carelessly with our education service. Does the right hon. Gentleman know that parents and teachers are weary of the upheavals and constant ideological changes? His proposal to make sixth form colleges independent of their LEAs is lamentable.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Opposition parties and consultation. The Labour party is interested in co-operation, but on the basis of ruling out the poll tax now and ruling in an efficient system of property tax, charged according to the ability to pay. The right hon. Gentleman's statement does not change the position one jot. Does he truly believe in consultation? For example, did he consult with the LEAs on sixth form colleges, or is it a diktat?

The statement represents the final act of a Government gripped by poll tax panic, ready to throw local government into chaos in one last desperate bid to save their political skin. It will not work and it will not wash. To use the Prime Minister's phrase, it is a "bogus sham".

Mr. Hunt: I wish to move swiftly to answer seven points. First, there is a paradox in what the hon. Gentleman said. On the one hand, he accused me of delay and, on the other, he said that I acted too speedily and was arrogant. If he will reflect, he will see that the people guilty of delay are on the Labour Benches—they are still failing to publish details of their proposals.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that we now have two taxes to replace one. He quoted what I said. I was referring to the marvellous document "Local Services, Local Choices, Local Tax: Labour's approach to the Poll Tax". That document states:

"A combination of a reformed property tax and a local income tax would bring equity, flexibility, accountability and stability to local government finance."

The document is dated September 1988. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wrote that, but he is just the sort of person to whom I am referring.

Mr. Barry Jones: Fair rates?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman now refers to the Labour party's fair rates document. That document, entitled "Fair Rates: Labour's Alternative to the Poll Tax", is one of 67 different documents and statements from the Labour party that I have had the privilege of seeing in the past few years. It says:

"The existing rates registers will provide a quick and convenient means of getting rid of the poll tax."

Fine. So what does the Labour party think about rates? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer all the questions, but I want the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) to reflect on this. A news release issued by the Labour party's press and publicity department has fallen into my hands. On Saturday 20 September 1980, Neil Kinnock spoke at Pontllanfraith, Gwent. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] The news release says —[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will answer the points but Opposition Members should not try to drown my remarks. They should listen to the words of their leader.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon you intervened when a Scottish National Member used the word "Thatcher", and insisted that the proper nomenclature be used. But you have now ignored a similar instance. I ask you to rule on it.

Mr. Speaker: If I did that, I was in error. I must have been thinking of something else. The Secretary of State must refer to the right hon. Gentleman by constituency.

Mr. Hunt: Despite his delaying tactics, I ask the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) to listen to what was said by his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for increases in

"the most unjust of all taxes".

What tax does the right hon. Gentleman describe as the most unjust of all—"Local rates", the very system that the Labour party proposes to use,

"which take most from those who can afford least."

Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition will eat his words. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members ought to listen. The Leader of the Opposition will either have to eat his words or come up with yet another policy.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, describing my proposals, which are one tax, accused me of bribery. I apologise here and now for the record amount of extra money that I have won for Wales in the resources that I am able to announce to the House.

The hon. Gentleman's fourth point was that I had created chaos because of the present billing procedures. After ringing round all the authorities, we have discovered that only 13 of the 37 charging authorities in Wales have started billing. I make it absolutely clear here and now that the Government will provide any additional costs that our announcement has necessitated, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join forces with the Government in pushing through legislation as quickly as possible to bring about a reduction of £140.

The hon. Gentleman then said that independence for further education colleges was a lamentable proposition.

Mr. Barry Jones: Sixth form colleges.

Mr. Hunt: For further education and sixth form colleges.

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: No; I will answer the hon. Gentleman's question. If the hon. Gentleman's question related to sixth form colleges, I am quite happy to assure him——

Mr. Jones: Consultation?

Mr. Hunt: I shall come to consultation in a moment, but I want to answer one question at a time. Sixth form colleges and further education establishments will welcome what I have said.

We have not consulted on the proposals yet because it was right that I should come to the House to announce them first. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside has been in Neath this week—I am not sure why. He will hear rejoicing in Neath that Neath college now has independence. If he looks at the proposals in the round, I am sure that he will realise that there is general acceptance. I only wish that he had not missed the opportunity to consult me.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I never thought that I would live to see the day when the Labour party would complain about the sums of money being made available to ease the plight of the people of Wales. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Labour party is now totally alone, sulking in the corner? My right hon. Friend will understand if I express a certain quiet satisfaction at today's events. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the people of Wales know that they have a Secretary of State who has fought valiantly to obtain for them—against all expectations—as large a reduction in poll tax as the poll tax payers in England have had, even though they started from a much higher base? They are extremely impressed with the flexibility and sensitivity to Welsh susceptibilities that my right hon. Friend has displayed in his consultation process and in his approach to the problem generally.

Mr. Hunt: I much appreciate my hon. Friend's generous remarks. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside and a Labour Government would have succeeded in ensuring that 92 per cent. of local authority spending was met by aggregate external finance.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I thank the Secretary of State for meeting my hon. Friends and me in consultation some days ago. I warmly welcome the commitment to unitary authorities, which will benefit Wales, and also the decision to consult on how that should be achieved. I also urge the Secretary of State to give community councils in Wales more responsibility. They should be obliged to take those responsibilities and should not be allowed to opt out of doing so, because they have a considerable contribution to make.

Will the Secretary of State explain to a puzzled Welsh population why he—the person who, just over a year ago, described the poll tax as being central to the vision behind which all Conservatives could unite—has now changed his mind? Could it be that he stopped at Ribble Valley for a cup of tea on his way to Damascus? In particular, will he explain why he rejected the notion of a local income tax, which all those Welsh Members who took the trouble to meet him were united in recommending?

Will the Secretary of State join me in praising Powys county council for its considerable success in creating Coleg Powys, which is an excellent college of further education, and will he assure us that that institution will continue—albeit perhaps under other governance?

Finally, will the Secretary of State assure the House that he will do his best to preserve the good sixth forms and comprehensive schools that exist in rural Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I appreciate the comments of the hon. and learned Member about consultation. The Labour party ought to reconsider its inflexible stance and stop hurling party political invective and insults. The people of Wales do not understand why the Labour party is the only political party in Wales that refuses to discuss its proposals with me. I believe that that is because those proposals will not stand the test of cross-examination. I promise the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that, if he wants to avoid cross-examination, I am quite prepared to listen to him, without interrupting or asking fundamental questions. I am prepared to meet the hon. Gentleman anywhere in Wales. I would merely ask him not to continue to impose new preconditions on consultation, but to get round the table with the rest of us to work out a solution that will endure for generations to come.

I confirm that Coleg Powys will be given independence under my announcement, and the move will be widely welcomed among the other 30 further education establishments.

I recognise the importance of the community councils, and find myself in agreement with all but three of the propositions voiced by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I join in the congratulations that have been offered to my right hon. Friend on achieving the same reduction in the community charge for Wales as for England. Will he take this a step further and adopt England's community charge reduction scheme, which is much fairer and will remove such absurd anomalies as have occurred as betwen Rhyl and Prestatyn? Is he aware that the only time the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs—with Members of all four political parties—ever broke into unanimous applause was when a witness passionately put forward the case for unitary authorities? Is he aware that there will be wide support for the policy of moving towards unitary local government in Wales? Thank God the word "devolved" was used by a Government Front-Bench Member today. Will he consider the need for a tier of government covering the whole of Wales? In my view, that should be a Welsh assembly or senate.

Mr. Hunt: I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments, I realise that he has very strong views about transitional relief and about the community charge reduction scheme. He has made those views very clear to me in private and in this Chamber. The reduction of £140 applies to every community charge payer in Wales. That will mean a drop of 55 per cent. in community charge bills, whereas in England the figure is 35 per cent.

My hon. Friend raised the question of a Welsh assembly. The local authorities association and others have pressed upon me the case for such an assembly to perform executive functions in the Principality. I have not reached a final decision on this question, but I have to say that the suggestions that have been put to me pose very considerable problems, not least because of the uncertainties and ambiguities about the respective responsibilities of the Secretary of State and of the

assembly and about the powers of the assembly. I am not at present persuaded that the creation of an assembly along these lines would be in the best interests of the people of Wales.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that it was a Conservative Government who reorganised local government in 1972, causing administrative chaos? In financial terms, it just about broke the Bank of England. What the right hon. Gentleman has said today suggests that the Government intend to try to repeat that exercise. Why does not he realise that the Conservative party is unrepresentative of the people of Wales? To realise how unrepresentative, he has only to look behind him. Does not he think that it would be better to leave it to a future Labour Government to make these difficult decisions? The Labour party truly represents the people of Wales, as is shown time after time in general elections.

Mr. Hunt: I am just not prepared to wait that long. The big issue in the next election will be whether Wales wishes to go forward under the progressive policies of our Prime Minister, or to go back to the failed and discredited Labour policies of the 1960s and the 1970s.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) was called on the last two statements, I shall give him a chance to recharge his batteries. He need not rise until towards the end.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): The Secretary of State referred to remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). I should like to refer to a remark of the Secretary of State. Replying for the Government on a debate on local government finance on 25 July 1989, he referred to the Opposition's amendment to the motion:

"It says that the community charge is unfair, bureaucratic and difficult to collect."—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1989; Vol. 157, c. 901.]

We all know that the right hon. Gentleman is a "Heseltini". In his statement this afternoon, the Secretary of State for the Environment said that we must alter the system so that it will be possible to collect the tax without difficulty. The Secretary of State would be wise to reread what he said and, perhaps, make a further statement. The poll tax payers in the Garw valley are jubilant because they will not have to pay anything if they get a rebate of £140. The poll tax figure there is £137, so they wonder whether they will get a refund of £3. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Powell: This is a very complex problem, and some hon. Members have sat here for three hours.

Yesterday, as a resident of Westminster, I received a poll tax bill for £350. I pay double poll tax—twice £175. When I phoned the council to find out whether I would get a double rebate, I was told, "I very much doubt it, but, if so, you will owe us only £70. In view of the fact that collection costs £68, it might be better if you didn't pay any poll tax at all."

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman's comments would have been more appropriate following a statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The statement with which we are now dealing relates to Wales.

Mr. Powell: You did not call me, Mr. Speaker, to put a question on the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment. I understand that to be because a statement on the situation in Wales was to follow almost immediately.

Mr. Speaker: I would have called the hon. Member to ask a question relating to Westminster.

Mr. Powell: As I live in both places, I ought to have been called on both occasions.

Despite all the support that the Secretary of State for Wales has given to the Secretary of State for the Environment, the poll tax is in a mess. He is doing all he can to get Tarzan out of the jungle, but can he get the jungle out of Tarzan? That is what we want to know.

Mr. Hunt: Now we know why the Labour party is in such chaos over these proposals. The comment that I repeated was made not only by the leader of the party. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who is the party's spokesman on local government, said of a local income tax:

"I have been an advocate of this as an addition to—not a replacement for—the rating system for a long time."

Those words are from the 16th of the 66 statements. No wonder we do not know what the Labour party stands for. The hon. Gentleman is fortunate not only to have more than one home but also to be able to expect a double dose of £140 in Westminster. The £140 comes off the community charge headline figure, not only in Wales but also in England.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Garw valley. Let me tell him that a lady from that area contacted my office and said, "Mr. Hunt, we all want you to come to the Garw valley and increase your popularity by distributing the money yourself." Sadly, there will be no refund, but people in the Garw valley will pay no community charge.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarvon): Is the Secretary of State aware of the very great welcome that we give to the ending of the poll tax? It is an iniquitous tax, and the people of Wales have wanted to see the end of it. However, we should have much preferred to see it replaced by a local income tax, and we have some doubts about the practicality of a head count in each household.

Will the Secretary of State, in the light of what has been said by the Secretary of State for the Environment, confirm that the local government commission for England that has been announced will have nothing to do with the situation in Wales? We in Wales have a tradition of doing these things ourselves. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to set up a local government commission for Wales? He is considering the establishment of unitary authorities. This is something that appears to unite all four parties in Wales. Comments made by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) a few moments ago suggest that there may be room for consensus also on the creation of an elected upon tier of democracy in Wales. If the Secretary of State were able to get representatives of the four parties together at this level, he would be doing a tremendous service for the people of Wales.

Mr. Hunt: Those who argue for a local income tax have not thought through the implications of what they

[Mr. Hunt]

propose. I am not persuaded that it is administratively feasible. It does not accord with the fundamental principle that almost everyone should pay towards the cost of local services, and it is contrary to the Government's commitment to keep taxes on income to the lowest possible level. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I carefully thought through all the arguments that he put to me.

As for the commission, I agree with him that it is important for us to do these things ourselves in Wales. I was not proposing to set up a commission. But, of course, I am happy to listen to representations from those who think that we should. I adhere to the view that we do these things much better ourselves in Wales.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the inclusion of the poll tax in the 1987 Tory party manifesto was a mistake? Does he further agree that, when Ministers and hon. Members go abroad, they should preach the gospel wherever they go to the effect that any Government who introduce a poll tax do so at their peril?

Mr. Hunt: I believe that it was right to get rid of domestic rates, and I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that it was the most unjust of taxes. I also believe today that it would be wrong to continue with the community charge, and I have made that clear from the Dispatch Box. I intend to abolish it at the earliest opportunity. I understand that Gorseinon college is in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I hope that he will rejoicce with all at that college being independent, and that is a result of my decision today.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): If the Secretary of State had a little more integrity, he would have said, in making his statement, that he had made a modest contribution to the turmoil in which Welsh finance has found itself in the past two years as the result of imposing a totally unpopular and unfair tax. If, according to the right hon. Gentleman, he has an open mind on the major issues with which we are now concerned, will he now state that if it emerges from the consultations that there is a justifiable demand for a Welsh assembly, above the unitary authorities, neither he nor the minority group in the Tory party who represent Wales will stand in the way of that demand?

Mr. Hunt: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is not trying to rewrite history. It is within my recollection—I was in the House at the time—that in 1979 there was a referendum on the question of an assembly in Wales. By a four to one majority, the people of Wales voted against it. We must be careful before we ignore that decision.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): When replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), the Secretary of State said he thought that the community charge had been a mistake. Will the right hon. Gentleman now apologise to the people of Wales for the leading part that he played in formulating that piece of legislation? Will he in particular apologise to the many hundreds of thousands of people in Wales who suffered severe hardship as a result of the introduction of the poll tax?

Mr. Hunt: The operation of the community charge has been remarkably successful in Wales compared with the situation in England. Just before coming into the Chamber I was given figures showing that local authorities in Wales have now collected more than 95 per cent. of the money due under the community charge. I readily admit, and said so to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), that just as I believe it was right to abolish the rates, so I believe it is now right to abolish the community charge.

Mr. Win Griffiths: It was apparent from the Secretary of State's announcement that, beyond saying that there would be a property tax with a poll tax element of some sort, he had little idea of precisely what we would end up with. In that connection, several questions must be answered. For example, will all houses in Wales be revalued? If they are revalued for the purpose of the new tax, will all house owners and tenants have the right to appeal against the new valuations?

Problems are likely to arise over the definition of "adult" in a household. The allowance for the number of people in a household may be as little as 1 per cent. Whatever the percentage, will any weighting be allowed for each adult, depending on whether they are or are not earning money? In other words, will there be a zero rating in that situation? Many other questions will have to be answered, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will answer those at this stage.

Finally—*[Interruption.]* We also had a statement on further education. Bearing in mind the ballot decision for schools, will there be a ballot in sixth form colleges, and will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the situation in Coleg Powys——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Griffiths: I do not know whether the Secretary of State realises that Coleg Powys is on the same site as Brecon high school. How will the boundaries be defined for the purpose of this public limited company?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is a walking example of the fact that the Labour party should now rethink its whole approach to local government and come in and engage in the consultation process. Some of the questions that he asks are precisely those on which I shall now be consulting.

From the Labour party document on rates, it is clear that Labour Members have already decided that they will use the existing rates registers and will rely on them

"for as long as is needed to undertake a complete revaluation."

In other words, Opposition Members are committed. I want them to back away from that commitment and to come in and discuss matters on the basis that I have announced this afternoon.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It is astonishing that the Secretary of State has not thought fit to apologise. He is claiming an alibi, though his fingerprints have been all over the poll tax from the start. Will someone in central Government, notably in the Cabinet, be surcharged for the cost to Swansea city council this week of sending out 140,000 poll tax bills? Someone is responsible for that and someone will have to pay. Will it be the taxpayer?

The new two-tier tax will require a head count. Will it involve a register analogous to that of the poll tax? Will that not involve the same sort of administrative costs and burdens as the poll tax? In Landore ward in my constituency, £7·40 will be the total charge for those with

full exemption under the poll tax system. It costs Swansea city council £11 to collect that sum. What is the Secretary of State's advice to that city council—to collect or not to collect that £7·40?

Mr. Hunt: Against a background where Wales—I pay tribute to the local authority officials involved—has achieved more or less the same collection rate as was achieved under the old rating system, I see no need to apologise. Indeed, there is need to praise local authorities in Wales for having achieved such a commendable result.

The question of collection is for the local council, and the hon. Member for Ogwr—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member who represents Ogwr, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), will know the situation in Westminster, where apparently it is not thought to be worth collecting. The question of collection is for each individual council.

On the totality of what has been said, I wonder what the Labour party is so scared of. What is it so worried about that it will not follow the example of the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Liberal Democrats? Are the Labour Members scared because they have not thought through their proposals and do not know the figures, and are not prepared, therefore, to put them on the table? They ought to be ashamed of themselves.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): If the Secretary of State accepts my charitable assumption that the education changes that he has announced have more to do with education than with the survival of the Conservative party at the next general election, can he spell out what is wrong in his eyes with the present governance of the north-east Wales institute and its links with Clwyd county council? He must know that the county council was to spend £11 million on tertiary reorganisation. Who will provide that money now?

Mr. Hunt: I made it absolutely clear that approximately £100 million is being spent in Wales on tertiary education. It is my intention to have the same amount of resources available for further education colleges and sixth form colleges. There are no problems on resources. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who talks to me positively and constructively about problems in his area, should say to his hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), "Go and see the Welsh Secretary, just as all the others have done. Sit down and talk through the problem with him." The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside cannot duck the issue of consultation any longer.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I listened carefully to the statement and to the questions. I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for calling a Welsh-born Member who represents the English taxpayer. I cannot understand why my right hon. Friend, on the one hand, is saying that he is pleased to get rid of the community charge and, on the other, is making an enormous reduction in the bills. Will he be able to justify to the people of Wales doing away with a taxation system that would charge only £95 to someone in full work who could probably pay a great deal more? What will he put in its place? Because it is fair that people in England should pay a particular percentage, should not exactly the same conditions apply in Wales in regard to the money given from central taxation?

Mr. Hunt: I did make an apology before; the apology was for securing what has been described to me by some local authority leaders as an astonishingly excessive amount of Government support for local authority services in Wales. I plead guilty, but I will never stop fighting for the best possible deal for Wales. If it means that community charges in Wales come down by 55 per cent. whereas in England they come down by 35 per cent., I plead guilty, and I apologise to the House for winning too much money for Wales.

I see no reason why the introduction of a new system should lead to a reduction in resources for Wales. It did not do so when we introduced the community charge, and it should not if we decide to introduce a new system. The real question is, would the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside win as much for Wales in a Labour Cabinet as I have done in a Conservative Cabinet?

Mr. Barry Jones: May I again invite the right hon. Gentleman to apologise to the people of Wales for his role in imposing the poll tax upon them? Does he agree that he was guilty of a monumental error of judgment for which he must apologise to the people of Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I do not accept that. I said before, and I say again, that I believe that it was right to abolish the most unjust of all taxes—the domestic rating system—and I believe that it is right now to abolish the comunity charge. The hon. Gentleman cannot keep ducking the issue——

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No interventions on an answer.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is shouting at me. He should come into my office——

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hunt: He should come into my office and sit down, in the same way as Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have sat down. Why is he running scared?

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot have interventions in the middle of an answer.

Mr. Hunt: I shall speak to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside again when he provides an explanation of why he has come to the Chamber and yet at the same time is running scared.

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Has the Secretary of State finished?

Mr. Hunt *indicated assent.*

Local Government Review (Scotland)

7.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Government's community charge review as it affects Scotland.

These are our preliminary conclusions on local government finance, functions and structure, on which we will now have further and detailed consultation.

A vitally important part of our conclusions is the step change in central Government funding for local authorities announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on Tuesday. That is a major shift in the balance between central and local funding of local authority expenditure, and it recognises that the burden of local authority services has borne too heavily on the local tax base, not least because of the failure of local authorities to keep their spending at levels which it is reasonable to ask local taxpayers to support. For example, in the first year of the community charge, Scottish local authorities increased their budgets in real terms by 5 per cent. and, for the coming year, they have increased charge levels by an average of 30 per cent., despite a generous grant settlement. The Government have now tackled that aspect of the problem head on, by reducing local tax bills substantially.

We have nevertheless considered how best the reduced tax bill should be met, in a way which is fair, which is easy to administer, which spreads the burden as widely as possible, and which enables councils to remain accountable to their electors. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has announced, we now propose to replace the community charge with a new local tax which will have elements based both on the value of the house and on the number of persons living there. We will be issuing a consultation paper on the new tax soon.

The details of the new tax and the options for the personal and property elements, and the relationship between them, will be set out in the consultation paper. For Scotland, that will take account of distinctive Scottish circumstances. I can reassure the House, however, that the new tax will not suffer from the defects of the old domestic rating system. Most obviously, it will take account of the number of people in the household. People will also, rightly, expect us to ensure that disproportionate tax burdens are not placed on a small minority of households and that there are no large fluctuations following periodic revaluations. There will also need to be effective transitional arrangements when the new tax is introduced, which we plan to be in 1993-94 if possible, in Scotland as in England.

We will also ensure—if need be through rigorous capping of local authorities' expenditure plans—that the now reduced burden which local taxpayers will face is not increased once again to unacceptable levels by local authorities' spending decisions.

There is no change to the Government's policy on non-domestic rates, where we retain our aim of harmonising rates in Scotland with those in the rest of Great Britain.

It does not, however, make sense to look at the financing of local government in isolation from the functions which it discharges, and the burden thereby placed on the local tax base. I shall be giving further consideration to the allocation of functions as between central and local government, and consulting on possible changes.

I have, however, already reached a view on the position of Scottish further education colleges, which have a vital role in meeting the skill requirement of industry and commerce. We wish to strengthen their ability to perform that role. Many local authorities have run further education colleges with commitment and skill, but we are entering a new era, both in local government and in vocational education and training. Following recent legislation, colleges now have increased management powers exercised by college councils, with a stronger employer representation; but I should like to see them have the appropriate degree of freedom to respond more fully to the demands of students and the labour market. I believe that, alongside the establishment of local enterprise companies in Scotland from 1 April, this would help to promote the development of a modern, skilled work force.

The Government propose, therefore, to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to take all further education colleges in Scotland out of local authority management. I intend to vest the colleges, which I propose should be free-standing corporate bodies, with the land, buildings and equipment which they currently use. From 1 April 1993, the colleges will be funded by the Government. I intend to give staff the right of transfer of employment to the Government-funded colleges. Over £200 million is spent by local authorities on further education in Scotland. These resources will become central spending, with the corresponding reduction in grant to local authorities.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has already highlighted the importance, prior to 1 April 1993, of ensuring that the work of the colleges, their staff and students continues undisturbed. Therefore, I also propose to seek Parliament's approval to a number of measures similar to those already announced by my right hon. and learned Friend to have effect from midnight tonight in the forthcoming legislation in order to achieve this. I am placing further details of these measures in the *Official Report*.

My Department will be writing to all education authorities to explain how these measures will be applied. Details of our proposals will be published in due course.

It naturally flows from the consideration of funding and functions of local authorities, that we need to consider also the best structure for local government in Scotland. The present two-tier system has some advantages, but it also has some clear disadvantages. It blurs lines of accountability and it can lead to duplication, conflict and delay. It is often perceived as unnecessarily bureaucratic and remote from local needs.

The traditional role of local government is changing from provider to enabler. The structure must keep abreast of that change. I believe that we should now prepare to move to single-tier local authorities throughout Scotland. This will strengthen local accountability, and I believe that it will deliver local services more effectively. This is an important step to take and I envisage widespread consultation before proceeding to final decisions. I therefore propose to publish a consultative paper, setting out options for a new single-tier structure and seeking

views on possible functional changes and on options for improving the management and efficiency of local government in Scotland.

Since we announced our decision to review local government finance last December it has become clear that there is widespread demand for further change. The proposals that I have put forward today are, in the Government's view, a coherent and inter-related response affecting the funding, functions and structure of local government. They offer a basis for informed consultation and then durable change which, I hope, will command widespread support. I commend them to the House.

Details of the measures are as follows:

The Government propose to introduce legislation this autumn by means of which, from April 1993, all further education colleges in Scotland, under the management of an education authority offering full-time education will be taken out of local authority control and will be funded by the Government. My Department will be writing to all education authorities to explain how these measures will be applied. Details will be published in due course.

Institutions in the new sector will be free-standing corporate bodies, and will be vested with the land, buildings and equipment which are currently used by them. It is important that, prior to April 1993, the work of the colleges, their staff and students continues undisturbed. I intend, therefore, to seek Parliament's approval to legislation which requires the specific consent of the Secretary of State for all disposals by local education authorities of land or interests in land, including buildings used or held or obtained for or in connection with the purposes of the colleges. This will also apply to disposals or removal of equipment.

The disposals of land or interests in land requiring the consent of the Secretary of State will include outright sale, feuing, granting or otherwise disposing of any leasehold or other interest in land, direct sale and leaseback, and any arrangement designed to raise capital on the security of the land. It will also include any disposal which is made in return for the supply of goods or services. In referring to disposals I include entering into any binding obligation to make a disposal of the kind in question.

I am also concerned that, in the interim period before the establishment of the new sector, local authorities should not enter into contracts which bind the colleges beyond 1 April 1993 when they begin to manage their own affairs. Such contracts should be entered into only with the specific consent of the college councils of the colleges affected. Contracts for a consideration having a value in excess of £50,000 will in addition require the consent of the Secretary of State. The forthcoming legislation will seek Parliament's approval to a measure having this purpose.

I shall also seek Parliament's approval for appropriate sanctions where property or equipment has been disposed of or removed or contracts entered into without obtaining consent in advance. In the case of the disposal of land or interests in land without the consent of the Secretary of State, there will be a power of compulsory purchase with a right of recovery from the local authority of any compensation payable. In the case of contracts, including contracts for disposal, entered into without the consent of the college council concerned or, where applicable, the consent of the Secretary of State, there will be a right of repudiation, and such repudiation will be deemed to be a repudiation by the relevant local authority, so that any liability in damages will remain with the relevant local authority.

I shall seek the approval of Parliament for these measures to have effect from midnight tonight. This statement does not affect enforceable obligations entered into before midnight tonight.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Given the right hon. Gentleman's known and oft-expressed views, this must be the greatest humiliation for a Scottish Secretary since the office was established. The Government are in disordered retreat. The poll tax, in their own words, is admitted as a monumental disaster. It has oppressed the poor, divided the nation and created havoc. I am aware that many have been looking for apologies tonight, but I think that we in Scotland have a special case. The right hon. Gentleman should start with an apology to Scots for introducing the poll tax to Scotland a year before anywhere else, for defending the indefensible and for fighting to retain a poll tax element that Scotland does not want. The belated recognition that a property-based system—a rating system, in fact—makes sense means that the Secretary of State will have to spend the next two years denying everything that he has said in the past two years. Today's announcement is a massive vote of no confidence in his judgment.

We have been told that the poll tax is dead, but it is clear that a Tory vote at the next election means that people will be paying poll tax for at least another two years, and that even after April 1993 the one certain thing about the new measures is that there will still be a poll tax element in them. Does the Secretary of State accept that almost every Scot will see this as a desperate last throw by those in the Government who believe in getting the worst of every world?

The proposed package will mean delay, confusion and expense. It will mean chaos and misery because the system will simply be unable to cope with the Government's dithering and indecision. We know that the cost of shredding and reissuing bills in Scotland as a result of this week's Budget announcement will amount to £8 million. What will be the final price of this ill-thought-out, inconsistent dog's breakfast of a scheme? If so much had not been wasted by the Government, how many more teachers and home helps could be serving the community now?

The statement refers to a single bill for each household with two essential elements. Will the Secretary of State clarify one central point? Does this mean that there is a property tax and, added to it, a distinct charge based on the number of adults in the household? Or is it a case of the number of adults varying the property tax? To put it another way, is it two taxes added together in one bill, or a property tax varied by the number of adults in the house—a form of rebate on the property tax? If it is a distinct, separate tax based on the number of people in the house, will it be a flat rate charge? The Secretary of State must surely be able to answer those fundamental questions. If not, it will be demonstrated that he has no idea what he is proposing in practical terms.

Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the new system will not involve the administrative apparatus of the poll tax in any form? Will the poll tax register go for good? If the householder alone is liable for the single bill, is that not an admission—I hope that the Secretary of State will explain this—that the wrong-headed theory of accountability used to justify the poll tax has been totally abandoned?

Can the Secretary of State give a guarantee that the oppressive 20 per cent. rule will be abolished? Does he accept that it would be intolerable if that were to scar any new system?

The Secretary of State referred in his statement to periodic revaluations. That sounds a bit like a rating system to me. Can he say a little more about when we shall know the basis of that revaluation and what options are in the frame?

On structural reform, can the Secretary of State say when the consultative document will be issued? In his

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desperation to solve his problems, I warn him against attempting to do so by destroying local democracy. Does he, for instance, believe it right that after the switch in expenditure announced by the Chancellor local government in Scotland will control only about 13 per cent. of its expenditure? Will he perhaps comment on what that is likely to do for the gearing effect which has caused such problems under the poll tax?

Will the Secretary of State note that the Labour party is prepared to look at one-tier, all-purpose authorities but as part of a planned drive to strengthen democratic control by introducing a Scottish Parliament? What we will not support is any reform programme which amounts to sending in the broker's men to dismantle local democracy. The end product must be a system which allows local communities to run their own affairs through accountable local representatives. The Secretary of State will get no support from Labour Members for moves which are designed further to centralise power in the Scottish Office.

On Tuesday the Prime Minister promised all the answers, but what we have is a reflection of the Government's confusion. There is a total lack of detail and of clarity. The Prime Minister told us last November that he had not a clue what to do about the poll tax. Today's announcements suggest that nothing has changed.

Mr. Lang: I think that I can take the questions of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) as a qualified welcome for some of the proposals embodied in my statment.

The hon. Gentleman complained about the community charge being introduced a year earlier in Scotland than in England, but he forgets that we also abolished the domestic rates in Scotland a year earlier than in England. We are, of course, determined to allow no opportunity for the Labour party to reintroduce either its rates policy or its roof tax policy.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the waste embodied in the change-over. Perhaps he should look at the spending budgets of local authorities this year, those who are planning a 10 per cent. increase when inflation is likely to fall to about 5 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the relationship between property and the personal element. We are consulting about that. I hope that the Labour party will overcome the natural shyness that has surrounded its proposals for funding local government and will offer to consult with us on that.

Further consideration is required on the 20 per cent. rule of the existing community charge. We shall look at that further in our own time.

We shall also be consulting on the basis of valuation and revaluation. Our purpose will be to ensure that under the new local tax local residents will not be open to the high charges that they faced under domestic rates and the community charge. The imposition of excessive burdens on individuals and small parts of the community will not be possible.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the consultation papers will be issued. The local tax paper will be issued soon after Easter and our consultation paper on the structure will be issued some time after that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the effect of gearing on the contribution by local residents. Clearly, it is important to take account of the interests of local residents. If local authorities have been unwilling to respond sensibly to their accountability to local residents under the community charge system, we shall have to take account of the need for accountability to the United Kingdom taxpayer who is now funding a substantial proportion of local government spending.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for one-tier local authorities throughout Scotland, but it is absurd to reduce bureaucracy and tiers of government by abolishing one tier, only to reintroduce them in the form of a Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers. That does not make sense. The hon. Gentleman should consider the package as a whole. For the first time, we are looking at the funding, function and structure of local government all at once. I believe that our answers will commend themselves to the people of Scotland.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am delighted at the Government's acceptance of some of the proposals contained in my paper? In particular, I commend the transfer to value added tax of a proportion of the community charge. The £140 reduction will be very welcome to the people in my constituency and throughout Scotland. I also welcome the proposals on education as the beginning of moves towards other measures proposed in my paper.

I welcome one-tier local authorities, which was also a proposal in my paper. I believe that it is essential that the authorities are close to the people. That is why I believe that they should be based on the districts. That is important. I welcome the opportunity for consultation because I believe that, thus far, the Government have shown that consultation means just that. If it did not, they would not have accepted so many of the measures contained in my paper.

We should now concentrate our energies and efforts on exposing the fraudulent individuals who have not paid their community charge and who are unfit to sit on local councils or in Parliament because they will not accept the law of the land.

Mr. Lang: I am delighted at my hon. Friend's delight. He is living testimony to the value of consultation. It is a pity that the Labour party does not have sufficient confidence in its proposals to enter into consultation with us.

My hon. Friend welcomed the increase in central Government funding which has enabled community charges to be reduced so substantially for next year. I am sure that he will welcome the fact that in Tayside region the community charge level will be down to £245 in Angus and £253 in Perth and Kinross. In Dundee city, however, under strong Labour control, the charge remains £295.

I note my hon. Friend's preference for districts as the basis for single-tier local authorities. That may be the best solution in some parts of Scotland. It may be individual districts or combinations of districts. However, that may not be appropriate throughout Scotland. In other areas it may be that the regions will form a better basis. The consultation process will give us an opportunity to hear views from all over Scotland on this important matter.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is it not a disgrace that Scotland, having suffered the injustice of this wicked tax being imposed upon it first, had to wait so long for a statement—the last statement today? Will the Secretary of

State accept that for the past two years he and his Government have been digging a hole for themselves into which, on Tuesday, the Chancellor threw £4·25 billion of taxpayers' money? Today the Secretary of State and the Government are digging again. They have replaced the most unpopular tax with two unpopular taxes—a combination of the rates and the poll tax. How will it be more efficient and simple to collect if it requires both a valuation of property and a head count? Will it not be more expensive to collect than either the rates or the poll tax?

We welcome the fact that the Government have taken on board almost all the recommendations that the Liberal Democrats put to them on the structure of local government. We believe that there should be single-tier local authorities and that they should be drawn up on the basis of the wishes of the local community and not imposed centrally or uniformly.

Will he acknowledge that the removal of further education colleges from local authorities is not justified in terms of administration? Which local authorities have failed to provide the necessary investment and support to the further education authorities upon which he is justifying this move?

Mr. Lang: I am not suggesting that any local authorities have failed to do that. I said that most local authorities had run their further education colleges with skill and commitment. However, we are making new arrangements and attaching new importance to vocational education and training and, given the changed role of further education colleges and the new college councils that we are setting up with a strong private sector component, it is appropriate to give them independence and fund them directly from the Scottish Office. That allows local authorities to concentrate more fully on providing services or enabling the services to be provided. That is their more important obligation.

I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) for some of the elements of the statement. Again, it is testimony to the value of consultation. I valued the meeting that I had with the Liberal Democrats. I did not agree with them about a local income tax because it would be difficult to administer. Also, a burden of 8p or 9p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax would not be an acceptable burden in Scotland. However, I value the hon. Gentleman's support for the other measures.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we threw £4·25 billion of taxpayers' money at the problem. He forgets that that money is being raised from the taxpayer in the form of extra VAT. It is being raised in a way that is more widely spread and more certain of collection than has been the case with the community charge.

The new local tax will not be two taxes. It will be one tax bill with two components, the details of which have yet to be established. Again, I would welcome continuing consultation with the Liberal Democrats to establish how best that can be achieved.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Never in the course of human history has such abject failure been admitted with so little humility. The Secretary of State has demonstrated that he has learnt nothing from the poll tax disaster. Is he not simply producing the poll tax by another name? The new system will have all the difficulties, penalties and failures that we have had to suffer for the past few years.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he is prepared to consult on relationships in local government. Is he aware that we in Scotland are concerned with only one consultation—a consultation with the electorate at a general election—when the Secretary of State, like the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and the poll tax, will be swept into the dustbin of history?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to defend some of the underlying principles of the poll tax, which achieved a valuable improvement in accountability and in the spread of the burden of local government. Of course there have been disadvantages. The changes to the register were far more substantial than we had expected, even on the basis of the most professional advice. The failure of some local authorities adequately to collect the charge added to our problems, as did the high spending levels of some local authorities.

We must ensure that the gains and the underlying principles of the community charge, which were broadly accepted, are not lost sight of. Those principles are being carried forward in the new arrangements—we are creating a broader tax base and greater accountability, and we have achieved a greater recognition by local residents that local services must be paid for. The cost of local services has risen substantially and we must find the fairest and most durable way of paying for them. In that context, it is sensible to consider function and structure as well as funding. That is what we are doing. We should welcome consultation with the Opposition on the details of our proposals.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Can the Secretary of State tell us whether, under his proposals, joint and several liability will be ended? Can he say whether Scottish poll tax payers will get more than the £140 reduction in their bills because we have faced those bills for a year longer? If any of the changes are justified, surely more money must be forthcoming for Scottish poll tax payers.

Is not it a disgrace that further education should be swept up in the general debate? It is an issue of such major importance that it should be dealt with in a debate of its own. What are Scottish further education students who wish to learn crafts and pursue other such studies and their potential or real employers supposed to do if they are dissatisfied with the level of funding for or provision of courses, or with any other aspects? They could take their complaints to the local authority, but they will now have to take them to a Government who, by their actions over the past 12 years, have shown that they never listen and never understand.

Mr. Lang: I entirely agree about the importance of further education. If I were to make a separate statement about that, the House would be sitting all night. I am sure that the House will understand the desirability of making a statement on further education alongside other local government reforms as they are related. The Government attach great importance to further education, which is why we are making changes. In the new funding arrangements for further education colleges, there will be a basic budget

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and another incentive budget related to the number of students that they attract. That will be of great value to further education.

The hon. Lady asked about joint and several liability. That will remain for the remaining period of the community charge. Any new arrangements will apply in the context of the new local tax.

Retrospection of the increased contribution from central Government relates to the level of community charge payments being asked of local residents in the coming year. It is our purpose that the money should go straight to them and not run the risk of being diverted into local government to end up in higher spending. Does the hon. Lady believe that the increase in VAT should also be retrospective?

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Does the Minister agree that it is an affront to democracy that he should come to the House and say that he has half an hour to tell us about changes in local government finance and functions to a measure which spent about 140 hours in Committee and had to be guillotined? Should he not have made separate statements on education and on finance? Will he now make a statement on the 20 per cent. rule? Does he agree fundamentally with the 20 per cent. rule, or does he intend to change it? Does he intend to collect the 20 per cent. on the property element of the new tax or on the individual element of the tax? Will he now make a statement?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady's questions will be answered in the consultation process. We have our views on what might be the best solution, but we believe in consultation. I wish that the Labour party would join in.

The hon. Lady will have heard the answer that I gave a few moments ago about a separate statement.

On the question of the time available to consider such matters, I emphasise that we shall publish a consultative document on the important features of my statement. There will be ample opportunity for further consultation, debate and consideration of all aspects of these important proposals.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Does the Minister realise that, following his humiliating U-turn, he is left without a shred of credibility? Will he try to redeem himself by ensuring that the people of Scotland, who, after all, have paid the evil poll tax for a year longer than people in any other part of the country, are properly compensated? Will he fight in the review and in all the consultations to ensure that the 20 per cent. rule is abolished so that pensioners and the poorest people in our community will be taken out of the poll tax immediately? Will he dither and dally over reform of local government structure as he has over the poll tax, or will he learn that he who Heseltines is lost?

Mr. Lang: We got rid of domestic rates in Scotland a year earlier than in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is our purpose that by maintaining a Conservative Government we shall never have to return to domestic rates. The 20 per cent. rule and other matters relating to the continuance of the community charge are still under consideration.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On the poll tax element of what we now know as the Bill Walker tax, can the Secretary of State tell us how he intends to deal with student nurses and students in general and with service men? What arrangements will he make for adults who move house during the course of a year and how will he deal with a household that takes in an elderly adult relative to care for? How will adults be registered? Will there continue to be a poll tax type register or will the electoral register or Inland Revenue information be used? Those are all important questions. If he cannot answer them—as he and his colleagues have been unable to answer many previous detailed questions—we can come to only one conclusion: the two-tax system has been introduced in panic in exactly the same way as the poll tax was introduced after the revolt of the Troon ratepayers—the Secretary of State was one of them—following revaluation. This tax would suffer the same fate as the poll tax if it were introduced. Thankfully, it will not be introduced because as soon as the electorate knows the truth it will ensure that the measure has no chance of seeing the light of day.

Mr. Lang: One minute we are accused of dithering, the next we are accused of panic. The truth is that we are proceeding in an orderly way on a range of important and interrelated issues. We have thought through our preliminary findings, narrowed the options and presented our views to the House at this interim stage. We have also invited the Opposition and others to join in the consultation process. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has a number of views on specific aspects, which we must resolve. I hope that he will take part in the consultation—the quality of the outcome would be that much better for it.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Today we have watched a Secretary of State who, as a Whitehall policeman knows, has recently been wandering around aimlessly looking for something to get hold of. He does not even have the support of his Back Benchers—the situation is worse even than for the earlier statement on Wales. The Secretary of State for Scotland has only one Back Bencher to support him, and that only because the hon. Gentleman concerned thinks that he wrote the paper. It is a shambles. We have to listen to this aimless Secretary of State telling us how Bill Walker saved the people of Scotland when 10,000 civil servants in the Scottish Office are supposed to be doing that. We might feel like joining in the consultation process if the Secretary of State would answer some of our questions. Unless and until he does, he cannot expect us to do other than put his proposals to the test at a general election.

Mr. Lang: I shall welcome putting them to the test in a general election. I have no doubt that our single new tax will be preferred to Labour's roof tax and rates.

On the question of support, I notice that only about a third of the Scottish Labour party is here today. My hon. Friends are out and about in Scotland proclaiming the virtues of the new arrangements.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) asked one question that the Secretary of State did not answer. Will the Secretary of State confirm that a vote for the Tory party at the next election will mean a vote for another two

years of the poll tax in its present form? On what basis will the new charge be levied? What services will it cover and which authority will be responsible for administering it? Is it not the case that the poll tax is not dead but alive and well in the new Tory two-tax?

Mr. Lang: No, that is not true. We propose a single tax with a property element and a personal element. The benefit of that is to achieve a tax which is durable and stable, and which keeps a broad base, such as we have achieved under the community charge.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about voting for the Conservative party and thus keeping the community charge that much longer. The Labour party could not wind up the existing community charge arrangements any quicker than we can. The hon. Gentleman asked which authority would be responsible for levying the tax. That will depend on the outcome of our consultations on the structure of local government, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give us his views on that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It might add to the general amusement of the House if the Secretary of State would detail for our benefit the exact moment when he was dragged to the conclusion that the poll tax ought to be abolished. The Secretary of State refuses to give an apology to the people of Scotland. Will not he acknowledge that there will be a tremendous groundswell of opinion that there should be compensation for the additional year in which Scotland had to suffer under the poll tax burden?

Is the remark in the statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment that most people should be asked for a contribution an acknowledgement from the Government, at last, that the sick, the poor and the unemployed—those with no capacity to earn—should not be dragooned into making contributions for local services? Does the Secretary of State agree that in those circumstances, with a tax in which no one—not even he—believes, it would be wholly unacceptable for poindings, warrant sales and benefit arrestments for the poll tax to continue for people who have no capacity to earn? Does the Secretary of State accept that if Scotland had followed the advice of the Labour Front Bench, and stumped up and paid up, he would not be suffering such humiliation at the Dispatch Box today?

Mr. Lang: I do not believe that compensation would be appropriate in Scotland because we got rid of domestic rates a year earlier any more than I believe that compensation is due to the English because they had to keep domestic rates a year longer. The hon. Gentleman raised the matter of recovery processes. He seems to live in a curious make-believe world which does not recognise that local government has to be paid for. He should contemplate the severe difficulties in which he and his hon. Friends in the Scottish National party have placed many people who followed his advice. It is wholly irresponsible for Members of Parliament who come to this place and make laws to urge people in Scotland to break them, and they have no right to speak with authority in this debate.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that everyone in Scotland, and especially in Lanarkshire, will be glad to see an end to the poll tax? However, it is an especially tragic time in Scotland for the Government to have the whole structure of local government and of local government finance fall to bits in their incompetent hands. Does the Secretary of State realise that we have already lost 3,000 jobs in steel in Scotland this year and that there will probably be another 5,000 consequential job losses? At this time we need a smoothly functioning structure for local government, industrial development and local finance, but all we have is a shambles.

We have a new enterprise company which has had its training allowance cut at a time when it should be providing 8,000 new jobs. We have a steel readaptation benefit scheme so incompetently administered from Sheffield that it is incapable of handling the redundancies that have already occurred. Vital effort is needed from Bell college and Motherwell college in the retraining of thousands of workers, yet the future of those colleges is being thrown into total uncertainty by the crazy collapse of Government policy. May not some priority, some finance and some competent administration be given to the crisis that we face in Lanarkshire?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman does himself no service and underrates the enormous commitment of many bodies and organisations in Lanarkshire, both public and private, to come together and work for the economic regeneration of that county. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland—the Minister for Industry and Local Government—supervises a working group on which regional and district councils, the East Kilbride development corporation, the local enterprise company and other bodies are represented. All have come together and all have substantial resources, commitment and finance at their disposal to bring to bear on the problem. No one can say that the Government are neglecting Lanarkshire when we are bringing so much attention to bear on its problems. What we propose now will release the further education colleges to expand, to develop and to improve the quality of training for the future.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does the Secretary of State recall that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is the Under-Secretary of State, and the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who is the Minister of State, vigorously campaigned against any proposal for a property tax? How do they reconcile their position with supporting the new double tax, which is both a tax on property and a poll tax? Is there not a more serious charge than the humiliation of the Secretary of State to be laid at the Government's door today? It is that there is a lack of integrity in the Government. The two Ministers should resign.

Mr. Lang: I have not the slightest doubt that my hon. Friends, who, like myself, would not have been happy with any return to domestic rates, recognise the virtues of the new local tax. It should be seen not only in the context of the tax itself, with its two components of personal and property tax, and with the provision that we intend to ensure that local authorities can never again ride roughshod over local residents and raise the burdens on them to unacceptable levels, but against the background of the substantial step change in the funding of local government from local government to central Government, with a far more substantial contribution coming from the United Kingdom taxpayer. That keeps

[Mr. Lang]

down the overall level. Once that has been achieved, the rest of the debate can be conducted in a far more sensible and balanced context.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): My hon. Friends have made enough points about the poll tax and we have seen the Secretary of State struggle to answer those points. On the structure of local government in Scotland, does the Secretary of State recall that his party, when in government, took away the local council of Cambuslang and Rutherglen in my constituency? The Secretary of State has mentioned that he will take a flexible approach to the proposed restructuring and that he will concentrate on one tier. He has also said that he favours those one-tier authorities reflecting boundaries with which the communities within them can identify. Will he give me an assurance that if I can show that the people of Cambuslang and Rutherglen have an overwhelming demand for the restoration of a council of their own, and bearing in mind his remarks about local community identification, he will consider and introduce proposals for such a council?

Mr. Lang: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his courage. He, at least, is prepared to break ranks with his Front Bench.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East) *rose*——

Mr. Lang: I see another candidate coming up. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) is at least prepared to enter into consultation and to advance the case for what he believes to be the right local government solution in his area. I welcome his participation in the consultation and I guarantee to give full weight to his views.

Mr. McAllion: Why has Scotland, having been the first to get the poll tax, been the last to be told in the House about the fate of that tax? Faced with a choice between outraging the right wing of the Tory party by abolishing the poll tax and outraging the Scottish people by not abolishing it, the Secretary of State has managed to incur the anger of both by opting for his own two-tax solution —a roof tax for the house and a poll tax for those who live in it? Is that not the end product of monumental Government panic and does it not underline the fact that when the Government finally find the courage to face the only motion of confidence that matters—a general election —they will face certain, overwhelming and deserved defeat?

Mr. Lang: We are the last to tell the House about the proposals for ending the community charge because I am junior to the other Cabinet Ministers—*[Interruption.]* If the Labour party helps, as I believe that it will, in the return of a Conservative Government, in a few years I shall be a bit higher up the pecking order and the hon. Gentleman will not have to wait so long.

The hon. Gentleman talks about our new proposals creating anger. My feeling is that they have been broadly welcomed by a broad spectrum of people. The only anger and despondency that I see is in the faces of Opposition Members who know that they have little chance of winning an election for a long time.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): One would think that, after more than 11 years as a Member of Parliament, nothing would surprise me but I am astonished—nay, flabbergasted—that the Secretary of State for Scotland can come to the Dispatch Box, having done not a U-turn but several acrobatic somersaults, to make, without humility or embarrassment, a statement about the supposed removal of the poll tax in Scotland. It is a disgrace that he has the unmitigated gall to come to the House and not make more than an apology to the people of Scotland. We told him and his colleagues when they introduced the poll tax—and his English colleagues marched through the Lobby without even understanding or caring to understand what the poll tax meant, and then inflicted it on the people of Scotland—that it was obnoxious and unwanted. The Government refused to consult on the matter and entirely ignored the results of what little consultation they carried out.

I hope that I have got this right. The Secretary of State said that he wanted to change from a two-tier system of local authorities to a one-tier system because the two-tier system

"blurs lines of accountability, and it can lead to duplication, conflict and delay. It is often perceived as unnecessarily bureaucratic and remote from local needs."

He then told us that he intended to change from a one-tier tax to a two-tier tax. Do not the same words apply? If the Secretary of State was consistent——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. McKelvey: I am trying to be brief, Mr. Speaker. You know that brevity is my hallmark.

I must comment on the Secretary of State's performance. Had he been an Olympic acrobat performing for Scotland, he would have picked up the gold, the silver and the bronze for the alacrity that he showed in turning somersaults. Will he not be honest with the people of Scotland and say that he does not believe that the poll tax should go? Should not he and his ministerial colleagues resign and make way for the real author of the document?

Mr. Lang: The only thing that is blurred is the hon. Gentleman's comprehension of what I said about the tax. It will be a single local tax with two components. I welcome what I take to be his support for the abolition of the community charge.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): One of the few commitments that the Government have been willing to make this afternoon is that, under the new two-tax system, the poll tax register will go. The Secretary of State for the Environment said that repeatedly, and I take it that the Secretary of State for Scotland agrees with him. Having made that commitment, the Government must have some idea of an alternative means of tracing the number of adults in a household. Will the Secretary of State give us some idea—I do not expect details—of how the Government will keep track of the number of adults in a household if they do not have a register?

Mr. Lang: Clearly, there will have to be some kind of register, as there is with any kind of local tax. We shall consult on the precise form when we publish our consultative document. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will offer us his views.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): The Dalai Lama obviously got it wrong in thinking that he was the

reincarnation of the Buddha as the Dalai Walker from Tayside, North is clearly the fount of all wisdom on this earth. Now that the poll tax law has been seen to be an ass, can the Secretary of State find it within himself to congratulate the people of Scotland, who showed more wisdom than the politicians? Some of them argued that the only way to get rid of the poll tax was to have a general election, and that nothing could be done until there was a general election. Those Scots who marched, petitioned and protested, and some of whom withheld their tax in an act of civil disobedience, are the people who have destroyed the poll tax mark 1, as has been announced this evening.

We have heard about the tax mark 2. It is a tax on heads but not a poll tax, and a tax on roofs but not a property tax. It is a tax that dare not—at least this evening, and until there has been a lot of consultation—speak its name. When shall we know the real truth about what is to replace the poll tax mark 1? Will we know before the local elections in England and Wales in May? Will we know before a general election in June, or is that another trick to be pulled on the Scottish electorate?

Mr. Lang: I have already given the likely timetable for consultation on our consultative document. I will find it in my heart to congratulate the hon. Gentleman when he finds it in his heart to pay his fair contribution to the funding of local government.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): While I have long been an advocate of single-tier local authorities in Scotland, with the retention of the islands councils, and a local tax, I am deeply distrustful of the Secretary of State's words. The one word that he has used more than any other is "consultation". He should tell that to our fishermen, those employed in the national health service, and the representatives of my local authority who have been most badly treated over the implementation of the RENAVAL programme, which is designed to help the unemployed in areas such as mine which are characterised by scandalously high unemployment.

I remind the Minister that consultation is defined in the Oxford and Chambers dictionaries as, inter alia, deliberation, taking counsel together and consulting with others. I do not believe that these Ministers will take counsel in a sensible, humane and fair-minded way with the representatives of local authorities. Is there to be a supervisory body, based in Edinburgh, over the new system of further education? Will that supervisory body be filled, as with many other quangos, by Conservative party supporters and members?

Mr. Lang: I see no need for the kind of body that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting. We are giving each further education college, under its college council, the independence to run its own affairs. Labour Members may find that concept hard to accept, but it is the best way to generate the best kind of motivation in the minds and attitudes of those who run colleges, and to get the best results for local industry.

As for consultation with local authorities, I shall be meeting the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities tomorrow. That will be, I hope, the first of a number of opportunities to consult. Consultation is an important part of this exercise and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be as willing to enter into it as he is for me to do so.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): It is clear from what the Secretary of State has said in reply to a number of questions that the detail of his proposals is still to be fleshed out. He also said in reply to one question that he will confidently put this tax before the electorate as part of the Conservative platform at the next general election. How much detail does he expect to be fleshed out by the time that happens?

As I understand it, the Secretary of State is proposing free-standing colleges, which will have their own buildings, equipment and land. How does he propose to deal with further education in Orkney, where the further education facility is fully integrated with the Kirkwall grammar school?

Mr. Lang: Orkney has a habit of being a special case. Apart from anything else, it managed to collect 105 per cent. of its budgeted revenue under the community charge in the first year of operation—a wonderful example to other local authorities in Scotland.

As to the particular circumstances of the Orkney further education college, which shares its premises with a secondary school, that is a special situation to which we shall have to apply special arrangements. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman posted on developments there as early as I can. As to how much detail we shall be able to spell out in a general election, the hon. Gentleman is tempting me to answer a question that is not within my power to answer, but he must watch this space.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling an English Member of a United Kingdom Parliament, and one who always opposed the poll tax and did not support its introduction in Scotland when the Bill to set up the system was introduced in the last Parliament. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his part in the demise of that unfortunate fiscal enormity. I hope that the consultations, although widespread, will not be too long and drawn out. Can my right hon. Friend give us some idea of when he hopes to complete them?

Mr. Lang: The timetable may differ slightly north and south of the border. We shall consult on the tax itself in tandem with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales. It is clear that south of the border a rather longer timetable is contemplated for consultation on the structure of local government. The problem is rather more complex than that which we face in Scotland. Our consultation process may be somewhat shorter in Scotland, but I do not intend that it should be too short because local government is an important issue on which we are anxious to gain as wide a view as possible.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The severely mentally handicapped do not pay under the current poll tax arrangements. Under the new provisions, will they have to pay the poll tax element, the property element and the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT?

Mr. Lang: The tax is a single tax in which the components of property and the personal element are combined. Whether the severely mentally handicapped will be expected to pay is clearly a matter on which consultation will be necessary. However, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware of the sympathetic approach that we adopted in our handling of the community charge.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The statement has shown how inappropriate the House is for dealing with such matters. We have attempted to deal with the three important topics—abolition of the poll tax, the structure of local government, and further education in Scotland—in a short period.

I have some specific questions for the Secretary of State, first about further education. The proposed measures have nothing to do with further education. They have arisen out of the poll tax panic and the need to move more services to centralised control. I cannot understand why the Secretary of State cannot see that he is centralising rather than localising control. Will he confirm that all the important decisions on further education will be made by him in the Scottish Office? That is particularly distressing because the Government's recent record on training is entirely one of cuts. Only local government has managed to safeguard training by not making the cuts that the Scottish Office has made with the establishment of the new local enterprise companies.

Exactly what will happen when decisions are made? Will there be no consultative body or funding council for further education in Scotland, as there is in England? Will decisions simply be the diktat of the Secretary of State?

In the English statement it was announced that a joint White Paper would emerge from the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Employment on the 16 to 19 age group. May I have a specific answer on that? What will be the relationship of Scotland to that White Paper? Will we have a link with it? It is disturbing that the statement and the few words that we have had on further education refer only to further education for the 16 to 19 group. But FE colleges are of enormous importance to their local communities, not only for vocational education. Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that the wider role of colleges in adult and continuing education will be respected?

Throughout his statement, why did the Secretary of State extol the virtues of consultation but fail to mention consultation with FE colleges? Why has he gone headlong into introducing regulations at midnight tonight, with no consultation with FE colleges?

Lastly, may I ask the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]* These are my final questions. I now come to the poll tax. Will the Secretary of State devote some time—as long as he wishes—to explaining the difference between the rates and his proposed property tax? Will he also confirm that he said that there would be some sort of separate register for levying the poll tax and a valuation roll to assess the property tax?

Mr. Lang: No, that is not what I said. To answer the hon. Gentleman's other points first, far from a poll tax panic on this side, I discern panic on the Opposition Benches. The hon. Gentleman asked me several questions about further education and local control. He asked whether I would take all the decisions. I assure him that on this side of the House we believe in devolving decision making wherever possible. That is why we set up the new college councils and brought the private sector into them. That is why we are proceeding to give them the independence that so many of them want—he asked about consultation—so that they can better run their affairs.

I shall consider the precise funding mechanism that I shall use, but the central institutions in Scotland are perfectly adequately funded so it may not be necessary to establish a Scottish funding council. The hon. Gentleman asked whether there would be a link between me and the other Departments involved in producing the White Paper. I shall certainly be fully associated with that White Paper.

The hon. Gentleman asked what was the difference between the rates and the property tax. Rates are the policy with which Opposition Members are concerned. Property is but one component of the new local tax that we support. That component and the single tax are but one part of the broad package which at long last addresses simultaneously the funding, function and structure of local government in Scotland. I believe that it will deliver a solution which gives us improved local government in Scotland and will be widely welcomed by the Scottish people.

Business of the House

8.16 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, Mr. Speaker, for the record, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 25 MARCH—Conclusion of the debate on the Budget statement.

Money resolution relating to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill.

Third Reading of the War Crimes Bill.

TUESDAY 26 MARCH—Timetable motion, followed by proceedings on the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH—Debate on the Opposition motion of no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Motion relating to the British Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations.

THURSDAY 28 MARCH—Debates on the motion for the Adjournment.

The House may be asked to consider any Lords amendments which may be received.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I indicate that the business for the first week after the Easter Adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 APRIL—Remaining stages of the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill.

Motion relating to the Testing in Primary Schools (Scotland) Regulations.

TUESDAY 16 APRIL—Remaining stages of the British Technology Group Bill.

Motions on the Scottish Legal Aid orders. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL—Opposition Day (10th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject for debate to be announced.

Motions relating to Personal Community Charge (Reductions) (England) Regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 18 APRIL—There will be a debate on agriculture on a motion to take note of EC documents, details of which will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 19 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

Mr. Speaker, the House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet to consider European Community documents as follows:

TUESDAY 26 MARCH at 4.30 pm—Committee B Document No. 4345/91 relating to relief of ACP debt to the Community.

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH at 10.30 am—Committee A Document No. 7214/90 relating to protection of animals during transport.

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH at 10.30 am—Committee B Document No. 9908/90 relating to third EC equal opportunities action programme for women and men.

WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL at 10.30 am—Committee B Document No. 8353/90 relating to customs controls on baggage.

[Tuesday 26 March
European Standing Committee B:
Relevant European Community Document
4345/91 Relief of Debt of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xiii (1990-91)

Wednesday 27 March
European Standing Committee A:
Relevant European Community Document
7214/90 Transport of Animals
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxxi (1989-90) and
HC 29-ii (1990-91)

Wednesday 27 March
European Standing Committee B:
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 9908/90 } Equal Opportunities for Women and
(b) Unnumbered } Men
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-vii (1990-91)
(b) HC 29-vii (1990-91) and HC 29-xv (1990-91)

Wednesday 17 April
European Standing Committee B:
Relevant European Community Document
8353/90 Customs Controls on Baggage
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-i (1990-91)

Thursday 18 April
Floor of the House:
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 4549/91 Common Agricultural Policy: Development and Future
(b) 5032/91 + ADD 1-3 CAP Price Proposals 1991-92
(c) Unnumbered Export Refunds (Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 2/90)
(d) 6672/90 Agricultural Fraud Counter-Measures
(e) 6649/90 Community Rules (Checks and Penalties)
(f) 7320/90 Rural Development Initiatives
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-xii (1990-91)
(b) HC 29-xv (1990-91)
(c) HC 11-xxvii (1989-90)
(d) HC 11-xxv (1989-90)
(e) HC 11-xxvi (1989-90)
(f) HC 11-xxx (1989-90)

Tuesday 16 April
SCOTTISH LEGAL AID ORDERS
1. Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Prospective Costs) Regulations
2. Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations
3. Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations

[Mr. John MacGregor]

Wednesday 17 April

1. *The Personal Community Charge (Reductions) (England) Regulations (1991 No. 230)*
2. *The Personal Community Charge (Reductions) (England) (Amendment) Regulations (1991 No. 352).]*

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Why has the Leader of the House created yet another precedent by asking the House to agree on Monday night the money resolution for the poll tax Bill on Tuesday? The House does not approve money resolutions before the Bills to which they relate have had a Second Reading. Before the Leader of the House cites the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 as a precedent, may I tell him that I hope he will not equate the crisis in the Conservative party over the poll tax with a national security crisis that arose because of IRA bombing in 1974? On that Act the money resolution was the subject of general agreement through the usual channels. The Prevention of Terrorism Act was not guillotined, and in those exceptional circumstances the money resolution was taken first. It would be shameful for the Leader of the House to use that precedent of a national emergency as justification for taking the money resolution for the poll tax Bill before Second Reading.

The right hon. Gentleman has the ignominious reputation of having created two unsavoury parliamentary precedents, one on the money resolution itself and one on the guillotining in advance of a Finance Bill to replace most of an Act of Parliament which took months to put on the statute book and created hundreds of anomalies because of the capricious nature of the poll tax. That Bill is to be steamrollered through all its stages in just seven hours.

Will the Leader of the House confirm that he intends to keep the House waiting through the night of Wednesday/Thursday next week to consider any Lords amendments to this invidious procedure? The Government will look even more stupid if they keep the House sitting for potential amendments to a Bill that seeks to introduce the Government's new twin tax—a property tax and a poll tax with a VAT surcharge riding on its back. That is no way to conduct serious matters of government. It would be far better for the Leader of the House to announce a proclamation for a general election so that people might decide on these matters rather than ramrod them through the House.

When the House resumes after the Easter recess—which seems inordinately lengthy when viewed alongside the panic-stricken activities of the Government and the poll tax Bill to be debated next week—will the right hon. Gentleman find an early opportunity for a debate on criminal justice? People in all political parties were shocked by the revelations about the deep and fundamental failures of our criminal justice system following the release of the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton) *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I should have thought that the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), who practises at the Bar, would have been one of the first to recognise the need for such a debate.

Mr. Lawrence: I am grateful——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. and learned Gentleman need not be grateful to me because I am not paying him any compliments.

There is widespread dismay and concern about these matters, and it would be appropriate for the House to have an opportunity to debate them, although not in a party-political way because we know that such events have a long history. The Leader of the House would go some way towards restoring his tarnished reputation if he found time for such a debate.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's remarks about a general election were rather stale and somewhat irrelevant. He asked about the money resolution. The way in which we propose to deal with that is for the general convenience of the House and is procedurally in order. I explained on Tuesday that we needed to get the Bill next week because that is to the advantage of local authorities and community charge payers. We shall be interested to hear in next week's debates and in the debate on the no confidence motion the view that the Opposition now take of the Bill, because their view is far from clear.

The Opposition are entitled to table no confidence motions and, as always, I have arranged time for a debate. We welcome the opportunity for a debate, but I wonder what can have possessed the Labour party to engage in a debate which will cruelly expose its lack of coherent policies. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we propose to reduce the charge to local residents by £140 per person in the coming year, and to get that done quickly is our reason for proposing speed on the Bill next week. Does Labour oppose that? We propose to pay for that reduction by increasing taxes on spending. Would Labour reverse that? There is no rush because next week there will be ample opportunity to expose the deficiencies in Labour's policies.

It is a short Bill of five clauses. We have had a full day on the purposes of the Bill and on other matters today and we shall have a full day on Monday during which the matter can be further discussed. We shall also debate it on Tuesday and Wednesday because the no confidence motion seems to be related to it. That means that there is plenty of time to debate these matters.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about criminal justice. It was entirely fair of him to say that this is not a party matter but one that concerns the whole House. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced the setting up of a royal commission. I have noted the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate. I rapidly had to find time for a debate on the no confidence motion. My problem is that there is a great deal of business for the House to conduct when we return after the recess. I shall certainly bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's request.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In consideration of hon. Members who wish to participate in the Budget debate, let me say that questions to the Leader of the House should be directed strictly to next week's business. Most hon. Members who wish to do so have asked questions on the other statements.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I was about to apply myself to today's problems because I suppose it is many years since we had statements which lasted until about 9 o'clock. Can my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House find some way to facilitate those of us

who wish to speak on the Budget? Could he find a way to extend beyond 10 o'clock the business on the third day of the Budget debate? I cannot think of a way to do that, but my confidence in his ingenuity is so great that perhaps he can think of one.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand my right hon. Friend's frustration. As he knows, there is no procedural way to do what he suggests. The best contribution that I can make is to keep my answers extremely short.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): No doubt the Leader of the House will recall that in November, when we last had a no confidence motion, Conservative Members were somewhat divided on the question of leadership. The result of the debate was a nauseating display of unity among Tory Members. Exchanges today have shown that divisions are again occurring. What does the right hon. Gentleman divine to be the tactics of the Leader of the Opposition on this occasion?

Mr. MacGregor: I recall that occasion, and there was complete unity on this side of the House, as there will be on Wednesday. For the second time in a short period, Opposition Members will fall flat on their faces.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Government had not come forward with £140 for each community charge payer, there would not be a no confidence motion? Perhaps next week the Labour party will explain why the extra help to those that they claim to represent causes it to say that the Government have got it wrong rather than that the Government have got it right.

Mr. MacGregor: The Opposition will have a great deal of time next week to explain that and to answer questions about their proposals which have not yet been answered.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to come to the House next week to make a statement about a serious situation that has developed in the west Yorkshire police? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is great worry in west Yorkshire about the fact that the criminal fraternity is well in advance of the police on new technology? Is he also aware that criminals in that area were buoyant last week when they saw an announcement from the police authority that, as well as having lost 500 policemen on the beat, it is now unable to fill the vacant post of assistant chief constable? The Home Secretary is obliged to come to the House and tell us why he is not forcing the Department of the Environment to allow that authority to fill the post in accordance with the Home Secretary's criteria.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall draw that point to the attention of my right hon. Friend, but it is impossible to fit in a statement of that sort next week.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Remembering that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), when Secretary of State, used to delight in coming to the Dispatch Box to announce new jobs that had been established—for instance, 400 jobs in a motor manufacturing plant—is there any chance that next week the appropriate Secretary of State will come to the Dispatch Box, perhaps on Tuesday when there is a lobby on the matter, to explain what help the Government think that they can give to the more than 3,000 workers who have been laid off by British Aerospace, including 675 at the Chadderton plant in Oldham? Can they look to the Government for any help in their difficulty?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the company has said that it took the measures that it announced this morning to protect the long-term future of the business. It said that it is imperative that it achieves further improvements in operating efficiency if it is to maintain its competitive position in the world market.

On the commercial side, the company has quoted the effects of world recession, the weakness of the United States dollar and the continued price pressure on air fares as grounds for the need to reduce costs. I am afraid that I see no cause for a statement next week on this matter.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be not only unanimity among Conservative Members next week but relief, gratitude and enthusiasm in equal measure?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that since his last business statement the Select Committee on Trade and Industry has published its report calling for an early debate in the House on the closure of Ravenscraig, and that since the report was completed the situation has further deteriorated, with the closure of another blast furnace? Do the Government intend to find time for an early debate, given that the right hon. Gentleman has already announced today that the Government are bringing forward the remaining stages of the British Technology Group Bill after Easter? Is he aware that in Committee Ministers undertook to carry out certain consultations and that it is unlikely that they will be completed by then? Could the business perhaps be delayed?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly do not want to delay the business, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point about the remaining stages of the Bill to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

The Government are carefully considering the Select Committee's report, including its recommendation of an early debate, and we will respond to it in the usual way.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Is the Leader of the House aware that earlier this evening television interviews were held with the leaders of Conservative authorities who expressed deep disgust with the statement made by the Secretary of State for the Environment? If there is to be confidence in local government on the part of those who serve in it and of the public who look to it to provide services, is it not time that we had a much fuller statement on what is to replace the poll tax instead of the airy-fairy statements that we have heard today?

Mr. MacGregor: I did not see the interviews because I have been sitting in the Chamber for some hours waiting to make this statement—so I have heard some pretty full statements from my right hon. Friends on the subject.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On the "Poll Tax (Panic and Bribery) Bill" next Monday and Tuesday, I assume that the money resolution will be open-ended. Presumably the Secretary of State will deal with it, because

[Mr. Max Madden]

we shall want a great deal of detailed information, especially about whether people in receipt of rebates and transitional relief will receive some or all of the £140.

I assume that the guillotine motion on Tuesday's business can be debated for a long time and may therefore eat into the debate. Therefore, can the debate be extended to midnight to give us a minimal opportunity of debating this attack on parliamentary democracy, and so that the Secretary of State can answer many of the questions that he was clearly unable to answer this afternoon?

Mr. MacGregor: It is ridiculous to describe this as an attack on parliamentary democracy. We are trying to get the measures through the House—allowing a reasonable amount of time for them, given that it is a small Bill—to help community charge payers and local authorities.

The money resolution will be proceeded with in the same way as such resolutions always are. The timetable motion on Tuesday will proceed similarly. It will be published and on the Order Paper tomorrow.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the debate in European Standing Committee A next Wednesday may be the last opportunity that the House has to discuss the controversial order to do with the export of live horses, a subject about which many Members have received a great deal of correspondence? Does he recall that the Prime Minister gave an undertaking to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) that there would be reports relating to the intergovernmental conferences on monetary and political union in the Community? Can he assure us that after Easter the House will be given a verbal statement after those Council meetings, and that the Government will not rely on scrutiny by Select Committees such as the one that is to meet next Monday?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's second point. As for his first, I agree about the importance of the document relating to the protection of horses during transport. Like many colleagues, I have received voluminous mail on the subject and I am sympathetic to those who have written to me. The Government's position has been made clear: we are endeavouring to achieve all the safeguards that we require. It would be possible to raise this matter on the Floor of the House during the agriculture debate in the week we come back.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I believe that the Leader of the House said that European Standing Committee B is to meet twice next week. As someone who was appointed to that Committee with no consultation—I do not know what parliamentary crime I committed that I should have been put on it—I remind the right hon. Gentleman that on 22 January he said, among other things:

"It seems likely that each Standing Committee will have about two sittings per month."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 271.]

Yet we are meeting weekly, and now there are to be two meetings a week. May we have an early statement on the frequency of these meetings or perhaps on an increase in the number of Committees? I am asking for a break.

Mr. MacGregor: Someone else will have to explain what crime the hon. Gentleman committed to cause him to serve on the Committee. As I have often said, I am keen to review the workings of these Committees as we get more experience of them. They have not met at all in some weeks. One of the issues, as it was when EC documents were scrutinised in the previous system, is that the timetable is not entirely in our hands because it depends on what business is coming up in the Community. One step that we have taken to assist members of the Committee is to give them as much notice as possible of when it will meet—usually longer notice than in the statement that I made to the House. I am certainly prepared to look into whether there should be more members and into other issues that may arise once we have more experience of the working of the Committees.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I do not know whether the Leader of the House missed me during questions on the last couple of business statements, but he may be interested to know that I was in Canada studying baby harp seals which used to be clubbed to death, rather in the same way as the Government are clubbing democracy to death in Parliament. He will be aware that the killing of these baby seals ended as the culmination of a political campaign in the House and in the European Parliament, which forced the Canadian Government to impose a ban. It now looks as though that Government may be considering allowing an extension of seal culling, so I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether we can have a debate, if not next week, as soon as possible thereafter, on animal conservation. It is a matter of great concern to many Members in the House and to many more people outside it. In such a debate we could discuss the Canadian seal cull along with many other matters relating to animal welfare.

Mr. MacGregor: I had not realised that one of the qualities of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was arrogance. I shall puncture his arrogance and say that I did not miss him during the past two business statements.

Mr. Banks: Cutting.

Mr. MacGregor: I apologise for cutting the hon. Gentleman.

On the serious business that he raises, I was not aware of such a development. There may be other ways in which the issue can be raised in the House, but I shall bear in mind what he said.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill that affects all of our constituents will not be published until after this question has been answered. That means that many hon. Members who have already left for various reasons will be unable to gain ready access to it. What avenues are available to introduce amendments to such a significant Bill, which will be dealt with in the House in very inadequate circumstances on Tuesday?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that hon. Members who are sufficiently interested in tabling amendments will have arranged to obtain copies of the Bill. The normal arrangements for dealing with amendments will apply in this case.

Easter Adjournment

Mr. Speaker: I remind hon. Members that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday 28 March, up to nine Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the result made known as soon as possible thereafter.

BILL PRESENTED

COMMUNITY CHARGES (GENERAL REDUCTION) BILL

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Michael Portillo and Mr. Robert Key, presented (under Standing Order No. 48 (Procedure upon Bills)) a Bill to make provision for, and in connection with, a reduction in the amounts of community charges for the financial year beginning on 1st April 1991 and the payment of grants to charging authorities in England and Wales and local authorities in Scotland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 120.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [19 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance, but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax, otherwise than by virtue of goods or services supplied to one person being treated for the purposes of section 14(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 as supplied to another person;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

Mr. Speaker: In view of the delayed start of the debate, I am grateful to the Front-Bench spokesman for saying that they will limit their speeches to 15 minutes each. I understand that the wind-up speeches will be five minutes each to enable hon. Members who have been waiting patiently to speak to do so. I ask them, too, to tailor their speeches to about 10 minutes.

8.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): At last we come to the event for which I know the whole House has been waiting throughout this long day.

In his Budget speech my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out the three essential foundations for the renewed growth in jobs that we all want to see. First, the prospect is for sharply falling inflation—down to 4 per cent. in the last quarter of the year, and even lower in 1992. Secondly, interest rates are coming down—a reduction of two full percentage points since last October. Thirdly, my right hon. Friend predicted that output would stabilise in the next few months and then grow again—by 2 per cent. between the first half of this year and the first half of 1992.

In short, while the immediate prospect is for rising unemployment, the basis is already laid for a resumption in the jobs growth that has been such a remarkable feature of the second half of the 1980s; and for falling unemployment. How quickly unemployment comes down will depend partly on the speed with which pay settlements come down. The latest figures show a small fall in year-on-year average earnings, but that is not enough and it is not happening quickly enough.

Within the exchange rate mechanism, wage negotiators ultimately have no option, if they want to remain competitive, but to bring unit wage costs into line with those of our European competitors. If that lesson is not

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learnt, more jobs will be lost. In that context, I particularly welcome the measures announced in the Budget to encourage more profit-related pay schemes and to stimulate employee share ownership.

The Government have always attached considerable importance to the financial participation of employees in the companies for which they work. One of the most effective ways of increasing commitment at work is to give employees a direct stake in the ownership and prosperity of the business for which they work. Tax reliefs to stimulate financial participation have been introduced or extended in almost all Budgets since 1979. A number of proposals in the latest Budget continue this process and take financial participation still further.

Those proposals are further evidence of the Government's commitment to financial participation as an important element in employee involvement. They will provide an important strengthening of the links between the rewards people receive and the performance of the company for which they work. They are important further steps on the road to making our pay and rewards systems more responsive to profitability.

However, although the medium-term prospect for jobs is optimistic, I do not underestimate the anxiety and uncertainty of those who are unemployed at the present time about how long they will be unemployed and how quickly they can get back to work. While unemployment remains high, I am determined to ensure that those unemployed people have the best possible advice and support and, where necessary, special help to put them on the road back to a job.

As a result of the measures that I announced a year ago, we already have in place throughout the country a comprehensive package of counselling and job-search advice geared to the specific needs of individuals. The central feature of those measures is an initial interview for all newly unemployed people and an individual back-to-work plan showing how that person can best help himself and how he can be most effectively helped by the employment service.

I announced yesterday that I propose to build on that new counselling framework extra advice and help with job search. I am providing the employment service with £55 million in extra resources for 1991-92 on top of the resources already announced. Of that, some £38 million will ensure that its standards of service to its clients are maintained and, where possible, enhanced. Some £17 million will provide more help for those who do not find work in the first few weeks of unemployment.

As a result, for the first time, every unemployed person who reaches 13 weeks of unemployment and has no job to start will have a guaranteed offer of an interview—an opportunity to review the back-to-work plan and to assess further options for getting back to work.

New jobs teams will be set up to search out jobs that are suitable for those who have marketable skills and to match individuals to jobs.

Jobs seminars will be run to provide extra advice on job search for those who are not seeking work in the most effective way. For those with more intensive problems and needs, who are already eligible to enter job clubs after 13 weeks of unemployment, more job club places will be provided.

We are also increasing help to those who have been unemployed for a longer period. In the course of the next financial year, there will be an extra 100,000 opportunities in job clubs and in the new job introduction guarantee scheme. Job clubs work: 66 per cent. of unemployed people leaving job clubs go into work or into training or further education.

Finally, as a result of the further £120 million that I am making available to employment training, up to 245,000 unemployed people will be able to learn skills to improve their chances of getting back to work. That represents the most comprehensive range of help and advice ever made available to unemployed people. It offers some 650,000 opportunities on Employment Department programmes. It provides a wide range of options, so that the available help matches individual needs. It guarantees help to unemployed people at the point at which they need it most. Above all, it focuses on jobs and getting back to work.

Even at a time of rising unemployment, some 450,000 job vacancies are available in the economy now. Almost 300,000 unemployed people leave unemployment every month. Over 50 per cent. of unemployed people find work within three months of becoming unemployed. The help that we are providing and the new help that I have announced today is designed to ensure that everyone has the best possible chance of getting back to work in the shortest possible time.

May I now turn to one of the most significant parts of the Budget speech: that concerned with initiatives to encourage individuals to invest in their own training. It is of particular importance at a time of economic downturn that we do everything possible to sustain both employer and individual investment in training, so that, as jobs are created, there is a ready supply of skilled people.

The foundations have already been laid for a significant improvement in the skills of the work force. There are many positive signs that skill levels are increasing, and that employers and individuals are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of education and training to our future economic well-being. I draw the attention of the House to the clear signs of that improvement.

First, more and more young people, encouraged by the Government's reforms to schools and the further education system, are staying on in full-time education to gain the qualifications that will enable them to progress to higher levels of skill and attainment. Last year, 350,000 16-year-olds chose to continue in full-time education; the percentage staying on has risen by a third over the past decade. The number of young people taking part in full-time vocational courses in further education is also increasing: in England it has doubled in the past 10 years.

The second clear sign is the success of youth training. The Labour party has a consistent record of opposition to youth training and to the YTS which preceded it. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made a speech in January which set out Labour's supposedly superior alternative to youth training. But, as ever, he had failed to notice what was happening around him. He said that training for young people should lead to jobs or further education and training. Youth training already does that: 88 per cent. of young people who complete their YT course go into jobs, further education or training. He said that training should be based on national vocational qualifications attained, not on time served. Youth training already provides that too: there are no time limits on the training involved, and there is a minimum target level of a

national vocational qualification level 2. Already, two thirds of those who complete YT gain a vocational qualification—something which was inconceivable 10 years ago. That number will increase in future as training and enterprise councils ensure that all the training they provide for young people leads to a national vocational qualification.

The hon. Gentleman called for closer integration of education and training. That is also already happening—through the technical and vocational education initiative, through education business partnerships and through the assumption from next month of responsibility for work-related further education by TECs.

The third clear sign of the improvement in Britain's training performance is that the number of employees receiving job-related training has increased by 85 per cent. since 1984—a remarkable testament to the new commitment of employers to upgrading the skills of their employees. The depth of that commitment is underlined by the results of an Industrial Society survey published only this week. Despite the difficult economic conditions, 87 per cent. of companies say that they will either maintain or increase their expenditure on training this year—more than six times as many as those that say that they will reduce it.

Those positive trends are due in no small part to the wide range of steps that the Government have taken over the past 10 years to create an education and training system that is relevant and responsive to the needs of employers and individuals. But of course we are far from complacent; we still have much to achieve. We have set in train the reforms that will ensure that the momentum which has been built up does not diminish.

In the training and enterprise councils and the local enterprise companies in Scotland we now have the means of developing and building on this commitment to training. All 82 TECs and 22 LECs are now in being. More than 1,200 of the country's senior business men and women have committed themselves to providing the leadership needed to develop the skills that industry will need in the 1990s. That leadership has been built not by the regulation and compulsion so much favoured by the Opposition, but through voluntary commitment and willing participation.

Alongside employer commitment we must also stimulate individuals to take responsibility for their own training and development. Again, the way to do that is not by compulsion, but by providing new incentives and widening choice. We have already taken a number of steps in that direction. For 45,000 young people, in 11 pilot areas across the country training credits are only two weeks away. Training credits are a very important development. They offer real purchasing power to the individual and encourage young people to assume, at the very outset of their careers, proper control over their own training and development. If the pilots are successful, training credits will play a major part in transforming attitudes towards training in this country.

Career development loans, which were introduced in 1988, are giving valuable help to individuals who are financing their own training. They have led to a combined investment of £50 million in the training of about 17,000 individuals. Through the TECs, we are ensuring that individuals have access to comprehensive information and advice about training provision in every local area.

Finally, we have just announced an important new addition to our well-established national training awards, which give recognition for excellence in training. For the first time, the 1991 awards, for which His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales is patron, will include a new award for individual achievement.

The announcement in Tuesday's Budget of tax relief for individuals' expenditure on training provisions provides another important incentive for individuals to acquire new skills or upgrade existing ones. That sends a clear signal of the Government's support for individual effort and will provide a powerful incentive to those who wish to train, but are deterred by the cost. Tax relief will be given at source for training leading to national vocational qualifications—or SVQs in Scotland—up to and including level 4. The link to national vocational qualifications is essential. The achievement of recognised qualifications, based on standards of competence set by employers, is the best way of ensuring that people have the skills our economy needs.

These developments are all designed to give individuals the information, support and encouragement they need to improve their skill levels and widen the choices available to them. I am confident that they will have a significant impact on individuals' willingness to seek out training opportunities and take responsibility for their own training and development.

The Chancellor rightly referred to his Budget as a "Budget for business". With my special responsibilities for small firms, I take particular pleasure in the substantial additional help for small businesses. Every year my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for small firms invites those who represent small firms to put forward their views on what they would like to see in the Budget to assist small firms. We listen to their views and consider with the Chancellor what might be provided.

I am glad to say that this year the process has borne particular fruit with measures that further reduce the tax burden on small enterprises, lift further the bureaucracy and red tape which is the bane of a small firm's life and assist firms having cash flow and liquidity problems in the present recession. I do not propose to list again all the measures that will be of particular benefit to small firms, but I draw the attention of the House to the wide spread of measures.

There are measures which will benefit very small firms. One example is the increase in the VAT registration threshold to £35,000, an increase of 38 per cent. to its highest-ever level in real terms, which will take an estimated 150,000 traders out of the VAT net. A second example is the move from monthly to quarterly payments of PAYE and national insurance contributions for small employers, thereby improving the cash flow for about half all employers.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I shall make a short intervention because I would like to be helpful. Would not it have been useful if postponed accounting had been introduced this year? It will have to come in next year's Budget, and it would have helped small industry if it had been brought forward to this year.

Mr. Howard: It is always possible to identify other measures, but I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the combined effect of the package that my right hon. Friend introduced on Tuesday, which has been

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widely welcomed by small firms' organisations, will go a long way to improving their position and relieving the burdens presently placed on them.

The increase in the threshold for the small company rate of corporation tax and the carrying back of trading losses from one year to three will be of particular benefit to the small incorporated company.

In addition to these, the Chancellor made two important announcements of concern to small firms. As the Chancellor said, there is a case for a more radical simplification of the taxation of the self-employed. The Inland Revenue will therefore shortly be publishing a consultative document outlining its proposals for change.

The Chancellor also announced a review of the serious misdeclaration of VAT penalty, because of complaints that the penalty it imposed was unfair; while the review takes place, the penalty has been reduced from 30 per cent. to 20 per cent.

The Budget will help training and businesses, especially small businesses, and will help to foster and create jobs. The Government will continue to create jobs to fuel growth and to raise the prosperity of our people. That is why we shall win the next election and many after it.

8.58 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): This is probably the first time that an opening speech has been made at a time normally reserved for the replies. That is a telling sign of the Government's incompetence. In the midst of the worst recession for a decade, with unemployment rising and output falling, the Budget will be remembered not for what it did for the economy but for the poll tax.

The poll tax, like some virulent contagious disease, is contaminating everything with which it comes into contact; no aspect of local or central government appears immune. On Tuesday, it infected the Budget with deadly results.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Blair: In a moment, please.

From now, every time that we make a purchase—a new video, television, car, suite of furniture or clothes, buy a meal, take a holiday, go to the cinema and in every aspect of pleasure or business—we shall have a reminder in perpetuity of the most foolish measure introduced in modern times.

Mr. Howard: All the Budget did for local government finance was to shift the proportion financed locally to central Government. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Labour party opposes that shift, or is he saying that it would have financed it in some other way? If so, perhaps he will be kind enough to tell us how.

Mr. Blair: We would not have introduced the poll tax and be in this mess. I remind the Secretary of State that he was the Minister responsible for introducing the poll tax, but now he is going to stand on his head and tell us that he regretted it.

The Budget should have included, as we demanded, not a partial but the full restoration of the training cuts and made proper provision for a temporary work programme to assist unemployed people. Instead, the training concession, which is the only measure in the Budget on training or unemployment, is costed at £20 million—barely one third of the extra cost of resubmitting poll tax bills after Tuesday's announcement. Can there be any clearer sign of the Government's priorities or any better proof of their failure?

The real casualties of the Budget are all too clear. Unemployment is rising faster than at any time since the early 1980s—the worst recession on record—and 370,000 people were made redundant or have lost their jobs in the past few months. Twelve thousand jobs have gone since Tuesday's Budget. Almost 100 constituencies, three quarters of which are represented by Conservative Members, have suffered a rise of more than 1,000 in unemployed people. In the south-east, unemployment has risen by 50 per cent.; in the south-west by 47 per cent.; in East Anglia by 45 per cent.; and in the midlands by more than 20 per cent. Areas such as north Wales and Scotland, where the rise has been slower, are starting to rise inexorably from a much higher base.

The recovery for which the Government have striven so hard has been put at risk. In every constituency, there are closures, redundancy and short-time working. In every affected family, there is worry about paying the mortgage, meeting household bills and, above all, about how to get back to work in a labour market that is shrinking daily.

In every part of Britain, every sector of industry and every occupation in the workplace, the recession has taken its toll and is the direct responsibility of Ministers. They say that the recession is biting worldwide, but that is palpably untrue. No main European country is set for any fall in growth in 1991, let alone to register negative growth of 2 per cent. In Japan, growth will be 3·5 per cent., in Germany 2·5 per cent., in France 2 per cent. and in Italy 1·5 per cent. In the third and fourth quarters of 1991, we will be the only main economy in the world that will suffer falls in growth.

Moreover, it is not that we are first in and first out; we are first in and last out. Growth predictions for 1992 show that we shall grow more slowly than any other OECD country. We are worse off in another respect: in 1991, business investment will grow in Japan, Germany, France and Italy but plummet by almost 10 per cent. in Britain. Billions of pounds of investment are going to German, French, and Japanese firms from United Kingdom industry. Although, as the Secretary of State said, we do not have the highest absolute rates of unemployment in Europe, we have the fastest-rising unemployment anywhere in the OECD.

Against that background, we look at the Budget and the Department of Employment. In 1989, when unemployment stood at 1·8 million, the budget for employment training was about £1·5 billion. In 1990, when unemployment stood at 1·6 million, it was well over £1 billion. In 1991, when unemployment is topping 2 million, how can the figure of £850 million—a cut of almost half what it was two years ago—possibly be justified? If the money in 1989 was barely adequate for unemployment, then how can it be adequate now when unemployment is higher? The omission from the Budget of any proper measures for the unemployed is the most telling expression of the Budget and the Government's priorities. A clear and cynical calculation has been made that 2 million or more unemployed is electorally tolerable. I do not believe that the Government are right in thinking that, but even if they

are and it is electorally tolerable, it should not be tolerated by any Government who have proper respect for the society in which we live.

Our criticism, however, is not just of the Budget's failure to announce new measures to assist the unemployed but of its failure to correct past mistakes. Even now, because of the cuts in the budget of the Department of Employment, chaos and confusion are being caused across training provision in Britain, as hon. Members must know from representations that they have received. If we have received those representations, the Department of Employment must have done so, too. Our office has been inundated with scores of complaints that in every part of Britain training schemes are closing, trainers are being made redundant and training places are being lost. Many of those places are for the most disadvantaged people in our community. For some, employment training, with all its faults, offered their only lifeline to self-improvement. Many have written to us—some from high technology schemes for the long-term unemployed, some who are handicapped and some young people whose only opportunity that was to get back into the job market.

We come to the one measure in this year's Budget that is remotely concerned with employment or training—the tax relief on training fees. Anything that assists training is welcome. The great problem with tax relief is dead weight—in other words, those gaining the tax relief may have undertaken a course anyway and many of the poorer and unskilled will be unlikely to gain by the proposals. Having said that, it is clearly right that anything that assists training deserves our support. When we put that against the scale of Britain's training deficit and realise how far behind we are, can it be said that this sole measure in the Budget that assists employment and training really faces up to the scale of the problem?

The Secretary of State said that more companies were training, and we welcome that. There are signs that they are. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman should read the Industrial Society's report much more carefully before drawing his conclusion in quite such a black-and-white way. More companies are training in Germany, Japan and France, and to higher levels and more qualifications. The idea that they are standing still while we are catching up is nonsense. They are moving ahead, too. When we agree that Britain needs a training revolution, when we must accept that we have more unskilled employees than any other main European competitor, when we languish far behind Germany and France in skills for technicians, textile workers, shop assistants, engineers and computer programmers—almost every sector of the economy, whether services or manufacturing—and then we compensate for five years of cuts totalling £1 billion in Government funding with one tax concession worth £20 million, the notion that we are preparing ourselves adequately for the future is an affront to our common sense.

The tax concession is not unwelcome, but it is a sop—a political nod in the direction of a serious issue, made without any credible intention of addressing it. It would have been far better to adopt the proposals that the Labour party advanced in our Budget submission, not only for the restoration of money lost through training cuts and the establishment of a good temporary work programme for the unemployed, but for a new special skills fund of £300 million—adequately financed, in other words—to allow us to provide access to those who want to obtain skills for the first time and to those who want to improve their skills.

This tax concession—this sop—reveals the nature of the present Government. They are a Government with no purpose except to be in government. They are a Government with no coherence, no commitment, no passion and no understanding of the needs of the country. A Government who were concerned for Britain in the middle of a recession would have produced a Budget for Britain—a Budget for employment and training. If the Government can find £4·5 billion to salvage the wreckage of the Tory party over the poll tax, why cannot they find £200 million to help training for the unemployed? The reason is simple: they are more concerned about the jobs of 370 Tory MPs, at risk from the electorate, than about the 370,000 people made unemployed since the recession began.

On Tuesday we had a Budget that ignored the problems of the real economy. Today we had a poll tax announcement whose shambolic incompetence defied belief. It has been a fitting end to a farcical week. Contrary to what we were told by the Secretary of State, when the next election comes, this will be remembered as the week that saw the beginning of the end not just of the poll tax and the mismanagement of our economy but of the party responsible for both.

9.12 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) will forgive me if I do not follow him in detail. He spoke about the next election. I can only say that his speech did not impress me. On the contrary, it increased my conviction that, after the next election, I shall be greeting my eldest son and not the hon. Gentleman as the Member for Sedgefield.

I suppose that, following the Chancellor's statement on Tuesday, there can have been no prizes for guessing that all the headlines on Wednesday would be devoted to the increase in VAT and the £140 reduction for every community charge payer. In my view, that was not the most important lesson to be learnt from the Budget. The Budget was living proof that the Chancellor had refused to succumb to the many temptations that must have surrounded him in recent weeks to relax the stern and strict measures taken with the economy and to return as soon as possible to expansion and a period of lower inflation and interest rates. I was enormously relieved that the prospect of an election some time in the next year did not lead my right hon. Friend into irresponsibility. I am sure that siren voices must have tried to tempt him into taking steps that would not have been wise, and I congratulate him on having resisted that temptation, which must have been great.

My right hon. Friend referred to the prospects for the next year. With regard to economic growth, he said that we should return to an annual rate of 2 per cent. in the year to the end of the first half of 1992; that we can now see the prospect of the end of the current recession; and that, as we have already got two percentage points off the level of inflation, there are prospects of inflation falling to below 4 per cent.

Many people would have said that it was understandable had he succumbed and let off the brakes to the extent

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

of producing a Budget that was not prudent. I was especially struck by the Chancellor's repeated statements that a tight economic policy will continue. It is true that, nowadays, the room for manoeuvre by any Chancellor of the Exchequer is considerably reduced by Britain's membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. I believe that that is a good discipline for all Chancellors. If, by any chance, we were at any future time to find ourselves with a Labour Government, the discipline of the exchange rate mechanism on that Government's Chancellor—history has shown that Labour Chancellors have always been much more tempted, and have always reacted by moving into the realms of imprudence—would be much greater than is necessary on a Conservative Chancellor.

I was very pleased to hear that it remains the firm intention of the Government to move to the narrow exchange mechanism band as soon as that is prudent and possible. That is good news. Before the Budget, I worried that elements of imprudence might creep in. My worries are considerably abated. I believe that the battle to conquer inflation has not been diminished in any way and that the struggle to preserve honest money is being continued. I welcome the Chancellor's statement that the intention is to achieve a balanced budget over the period of the 1990s. That is certainly good news.

I have always measured Budgets by the reactions of my constituents. I am sure that the people in my constituency will be hugely pleased by the changes in the community charge and by the evolution from the Chancellor's speech about which we heard this afternoon—the creation of a system which, I am sure, will seem fairer to the huge majority of people in this country. I was glad—and I am sure that my constituents will be glad—that the new proposals for the raising of money for local government will continue the concept that everybody should pay something. If we are to switch the raising of funds from local to central revenues, it is far better that that should be done through value added tax than through income tax. Many constituents have written to me saying that there should be such a switch. The great advantage of raising extra revenue centrally through VAT is that it achieves what many of my constituents want—a system that reflects ability to pay. Because of the zero rating of food, rent and fuel, which represent such a high proportion of the expenditure of people on lower incomes, the VAT system gives a good deal of protection to those who are worst off.

My constituents will welcome the community charge changes. Because the proposed system is fairer, the taxes will be easier to collect, and there should not be repetitions of the absolutely outrageous behaviour of various Labour Members of Parliament, as well as Labour party supporters and others throughout the country, who have demonstrated that they have scant respect for the rule of law.

I am pleased that the new arrangements for the community charge will maintain the capping system to control extravagant local authorities that have been holding their charge payers to ransom. In Cumbria we have a grossly extravagant county council, run by a Labour-Liberal consortium, which escaped capping last year by the skin of its teeth but which is still holding the people to ransom by its various extravagances.

Not enough of my constituents have yet understood the pleasant surprises that are in store for them. When they receive their community charge bills for the coming year, they will see the considerable reductions in the charge as a result of the announcements of two months ago. Those reductions will especially help people living in houses which were previously on low rates. They will be even more surprised when they realise that a further £140 will be knocked off their bills.

The Budget's accent on industry will please those people even more. Most of my constituents never forget the role of industry in creating the wealth of the nation, on which everything else depends. The Secretary of State referred to the measures applying to small businesses. I shall not repeat them, except to point out that my constituents have been looking for such action for a long time. I refer to the reduction in tax rates, the help with VAT, the threshold exemption, the relaxation on capital gains tax and the new pay-as-you-earn arrangements. They are all welcome.

I congratulate the Chancellor on having achieved low taxation rates for industry which make this country the most attractive for overseas investors. We now have the lowest taxed industry in the European Community and the United States. As a result of the Budget, the powerhouse of the economy—British industry—will have tremendous opportunities in the coming years to expand and prosper and, as that happens, the nation will expand and prosper.

9.22 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): This truncated debate has been overshadowed in more ways than one by the poll tax debacle—the biggest fiasco in modern political history and a U-turn of staggering proportions. A proud flagship has gone for ever, yet we still have to hear a word of apology or contrition from the Treasury Bench. Any Government with an ounce of shame or decency would have resigned. There is much that I could say about the poll tax, but because of the shortage of time I will leave the matter there and deal with the Budget and the state of the economy.

The Tories have had 12 years in which to implement their policies. After all that time, we are plunged into the depths of an appalling recession with an explosion of mass unemployment. They have had 12 years to get things right—all those years of North sea oil, of £100 billion revenue and selling off state assets—but it has all been squandered. Where is the economic miracle they used to talk about? Where are the apologies to the unemployed? There were 86,500 more out of work last month—86,500 more tragedies.

We were told that inflation was to be the Government's judge and jury and that their aim was to achieve zero inflation. When inflation began to rise, we were told that it was just a blip. It has been blipping ever since. The Government have strangled the economy and brought it to a standstill in an effort to deal with inflation.

We have a record trade gap. When the trade gap went to £1 billion in one month the Government said that it was a freak. It has been a freak ever since. We have record bankruptcies, the highest interest and mortgage rates, the highest house repossession rates, unemployment surging, output down 2 per cent. this year on the Chancellor's own admission, manufacturing output down 5 per cent. this

year, and investment—the seed corn—down 10 per cent. It is an abysmal catalogue of failure. In no other country in Europe is the same thing happening.

The Tories used to talk about the Labour party being a party which might borrow. We have not heard much about that today. This year the Government are borrowing £8 billion and next year they propose to borrow £12 billion. If the Labour party had suggested borrowing that amount, we would have heard more about it. That money is not for investment, but to pay for unemployment and to balance the books. If the Government had restored child benefit to its proper level, they would have had to increase it by £2·30 instead of just 25p for the second and subsequent children.

The Government are a complete failure, not just at the margins but in all important essentials. We have a Government of incompetence and bungling. They should not be allowed to stay in office a moment longer. We need an immediate election to cleanse the country of so abysmal a regime.

I want to refer to some of the evidence taken by the Select Committee on Employment in the past three weeks. There was much else that I wanted to say, but there is not time. Last week the Confederation of British Industry told the Select Committee that unemployment would continue to rise all through next year, reaching at least 2·25 million. The CBI also told us that unemployment would go up for the whole of the following year. So unemployment will be rising for two more years, as far ahead as can be foreseen and certainly up to the next election.

Yesterday the Institute of Directors appeared before the Select Committee and told us that last year it had tried to be optimistic but that it no longer could. I will quote the exact words:

"Since 1984 the IOD has done its own bi-monthly survey of member opinion including asking members what their expectations are about economic developments. The February 1991 results are the worst in the life of the survey."

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) mentioned Europe. In the IOD paper there is a passage on the impact of European Community membership going back to 1970. Hon. Members will recall that in 1970 a White Paper said that the effect of entry on the balance of payments would be positive and substantial. I quote the words of the IOD:

"Over the period of 1970 to 1988, UK manufactured exports to the EC rose by 210 per cent. in volume, but imports from the EC grew by 640 per cent. The impact on Britain's trade balance was adverse and severe. Membership of the EC was accompanied by a turnaround in UK manufacturing trade from a surplus in 1970 of £16·2 billion at 1988 prices to a deficit in 1988 of £15·7 billion."

So during that period there was a turn around of £32 billion. The IOD said that the position is worse because in 1970 there was no North sea oil. The IOD also said:

"Although many jobs are created by trade within Europe, it is clear from the figures above that more jobs have been lost. This effect has had an impact on most industries in the UK. There is no reason to believe that 1992 will not accelerate this process."

In other words, the Institute of Directors thinks that it will all get worse. In the next paragraph the IOD says:

"There is a strong likelihood of a painful period of adjustment to the UK's entry into the ERM".

It also said that European monetary union could exacerbate what it called the marginalisation of the United Kingdom economy.

That is what we were told yesterday by the Institute of Directors, and it came out in the discussions and evidence that to the extent that our inflation, our productivity and our containment of unit labour costs do not converge with those of Germany—in other words, are not so good as Germany's—we lose competitiveness from day 1 of exchange rate mechanism entry. The IOD fears that our trade deficit unemployment will grow and drew our attention to the experience of East Germany, which changed its currency to the deutschmark but without the same level of productivity and cost as West Germany, leading to the collapse of industry and mass unemployment.

The Select Committee has been interested in the effect on employment of joining the exchange rate mechanism. When we asked the Secretary of State what research had been done on this in the Department, he replied with a letter in which he quoted a memorandum from the director general of the National Economic Development Council and the November 1990 issue of the *National Institute Economic Review*. That was very worrying because it told us that ERM membership cost France 700,000 jobs and Italy 1 million jobs. Those facts ought to be brought to the attention of the British public rather more widely.

The current issue of *CBI News* has an article by Professor Douglas McWilliams, the CBI's chief economic adviser. Speaking of the effect on the French economy, he says:

"How has the French economy performed since the start of serious EMF membership of 1983? The initial effect was slow growth. French GNP rose by below trend for five consecutive years from 1983-87 with a cumulative shortfall of 4·5 per cent. of growth compared with productive potential. The main feature of this recession was that output was depressed for an unusually long period . . ."

The article went on to say that wages were reduced. It continued:

"Nevertheless, reducing inflation still required rather slow growth associated with rising unemployment"

—a rise in the number of jobs lost of approximately half a million.

His last paragraph is very revealing and worrying, and all hon. Members should be concerned about it. He says that

"the French experience suggests that if British membership of the ERM is successful in reducing inflation it is likely that unemployment will rise to about 500,000 above its 1990 level at some time before 1994. And if Britain is unsuccessful the rise in unemployment could be substantially more than this —perhaps as much as a million or more."

The Institute of Directors told the Committee that the most important thing was training and that the responsibility for training the unemployed and paying for it was with the Government. A fortnight ago our witness was Mr. David Dickinson, the chairman of the group of 10 of the TECs who negotiates with the Government. He said that

"the TEC movement appealed very, very strongly to the Secretary of State in the run-up to the last Autumn Review, in that the level of funding should be maintained at last year's level in real terms, and that this should be maintained at least three years to allow the TEC movement to get up and running. In fact, we saw a reduction overall . . . in the region of 20 per cent. and notably 36 per cent. in money terms in ET, which has given the TECs a major problem. So we think that it is sending the wrong message to the world, to have major cuts in budget."

Mr. Dickinson referred to

"a most Draconian average cut of 45 per cent. in real terms . . . in their adult training budgets."

He then said:

"There is a Budget coming up very shortly, and it would be one of the most powerful things for this country if the

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

Chancellor were to reinstate the training and enterprise budgets at last year's level throughout, which would be three steps similar to the one that has just recently been taken."

The Secretary of State will remember that he recently announced a budget increase of £120 million. Mr. Dickinson told us that the Secretary of State had previously made a cut of £365 million and that the increase announced was only one third of that previous cut. Mr. Dickinson wanted the remaining two thirds. He said:

"I think that would be one of the most powerful things to ensure the success of the TEC movement."

That is what the TECs were waiting for and expecting from the Budget, but they did not get it.

What is the result of the TECs being underfunded? Mr. Dickinson said:

"Many ET providers will be virtually idle in the second half of 1991 due to the cuts in their funding."

I asked him:

"What are we to make of that? What is the significance of that? Do you think that is right? Should we be worried about that?"

Speaking on behalf of the TECs, Mr. Dickinson said:

"I certainly think the TECs and the Employment Committee and the Government should all be worried about it."

Therefore, not only are workers becoming unemployed, but the trainers are being put on the dole. That is the criticism that the TECs are making of the Government.

We heard evidence yesterday from Judith Donovan—the only female chairperson. She is the chairperson of the Bradford TEC. She said:

"In the early days of getting TECs on the road—less than a year ago—the dream was that TECs would negotiate a budget based on what they proposed to deliver in response to local needs. How the mood has changed! We now see a reduced national budget allocated to TECs and scope for negotiation almost nil.

The 30 per cent. cut on employment training budgets announced in January 1991 appears cynical when one looks at the way unemployment has increased within the previous two or three months."

That is the evidence that the TECs and the TECs' chairmen are giving to the Select Committee on Employment. *[Interruption.]* I have just quoted Judith Donovan, the chairperson of the Bradford TEC. The previous evidence was from David Dickinson, the chairman of the group of 10.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Mr. Dickinson is the chairman of one TEC, which is not yet operational. He is not chairman of the group of 10.

Mr. Leighton: I suspect that the Secretary of State is probably misleading and confusing himself. Is Mr. Dickinson a member of the group of 10?

Mr. Howard: I am always happy to enlighten the hon. Gentleman. Mr. Dickinson is a member of the group of 10, but he is not its chairman. He made it perfectly plain when giving evidence to the Select Committee, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), that he was giving evidence in a personal capacity. He holds no representative position.

Mr. Leighton: We have to be a little cautious before we denigrate or speak ill of a chairman of a TEC.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Leighton: I shall give way in a moment.

The Select Committee on Employment is interested in TECs. We want to be of assistance and we are taking evidence from the TECs. We heard evidence from Mr. Dickinson, the chairman of the east London TECs and a member of the group of 10. He negotiates on behalf of the TECs with the Secretary of State. He is a bona fide witness.

The second person I quoted was the chairman of the Bradford TEC. I hope that the Secretary of State will take notice of those people. Even if he does not listen to me or my hon. Friends, he should listen to the chairmen of the TECs who are complaining about their budgets.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman withdraw his wholly unfounded suggestion that I was either denigrating or speaking ill of Mr. Dickinson for whom I have the greatest respect? I merely sought to point out that the hon. Gentleman had described him inaccurately and was attributing to him a representative capacity that he does not possess. Will the hon. Gentleman now withdraw his remark?

Mr. Leighton: From the evidence given to the Select Committee, I understand that there is a group of 10 and that that group liaises—even negotiates—with the Secretary of State. It told me that it was to have a meeting with the Secretary of State on 18 March. I do not know whether the meeting took place. I have seen reports in the *Financial Times*, which is usually accurate, stating that the group could not agree with the Minister about the agenda because a new programme was being suggested—a sort of "make work" programme, a resuscitated community programme, a blotting paper exercise to soak up all the extra unemployed. The Secretary of State did not want that on the agenda. I read in the press that, as a result, the group of 10 might not be having a meeting with him. I do not know whether it did.

The Secretary of State must agree that the group of 10 is a bona fide body. Mr. Dickinson described himself as the chairman of that group and it is for the group to decide who is its chairman. However much the Secretary of State shakes his head, Mr. Dickinson is a chairman of a TEC. I have quoted two chairpersons of TECs. It may interest the Secretary of State to know that another panel of three TEC chairmen will appear before the Select Committee. It is right that the House and the country should hear what the TECs are saying. They are criticising the Secretary of State and he knows that. Before the autumn statement they asked him not to cut the budget. It was cut and they asked him to make good the cuts in the Budget, but that has not been done. It is no good the Secretary of State sitting there shaking his head and squirming—he knows that he is on a bad footing.

9.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). I am always glad to follow him because, whatever I say, I am bound to appear more optimistic. His gloom—especially over the European Community—shows how essential it is to reduce inflation and to boost savings. The Budget has set out to do exactly that.

I am also glad to follow the hon. Gentleman because he is the only member of the Labour party present who has any chance of remembering what it was like when Labour was last in office. In its last year in office, it spent two and a half times less on training in real terms than the

Government are spending now. It is also worth remembering that the Labour party has difficulty with the whole business of training.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) complained that the Budget did not contain initiatives to help the young or to help older workers who are unemployed, especially those with a lower level of skill. Yet it is interesting that when the youth training programme was introduced, Labour Members opposed it root and branch. Whenever they speak about it in the House, they give examples of how it is not working. The employment training programme was designed specially to help to bring those people back into the employment market. Perhaps it is not surprising that the present Labour party opposes the introduction of the employment training programme at every possible opportunity. I am not sure what the Labour party wants, although I know what some Labour-controlled local authorities want. No fewer than 13 Labour authorities have withdrawn altogether from the employment training programme.

We know that the Labour party wants a comprehensive system of vocational qualifications. One of the most encouraging features of training now is the move towards national vocational qualifications. An enormous amount of work has already been done and there is a huge amount still to do. I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that the National Council for Vocational Qualifications needs to be a little careful about the elaboration with which it defines some of its competencies. It is putting a huge burden on many hard-working people and we may not need to be quite so refined.

The main point about the NCVQ and its work is that, for the first time, we have a way in which to find equivalence in the vast jungle of qualifications, which go from the bottom to the top of the training ladder. By the end of 1992, such qualifications will cover 80 per cent. of the work force. The national vocational qualification is the best instrument that this country has ever had for destroying the peculiarly British disease which rates academic learning higher than vocational learning. The universities already accept people on the basis of their national vocational qualifications. I want that to be carried through so that it covers everyone. We should then achieve the parity of esteem between academic learning and technological and vocational learning which is long overdue.

The Labour party also wants local training consortia. I am not quite sure what they are, but they sound quite like the training and enterprise councils. I am delighted that we are ahead of the Labour party and I am sure that it is pleased, too.

The Labour party also wants a 59 per cent. top rate of income tax—undoubtedly a tremendous stimulus to the economy. It also wants a minimum wage. The issue that has put this country further behind in the training stakes than almost any other is the fact that the money that young people with no qualifications get is far too high a percentage of the money that those who have qualifications can achieve. The Labour party wants to enshrine that for ever by insisting on a minimum wage.

We should talk a little more about the good news. Yesterday, in the Palace of Westminster, I had the honour to give certificates to a number of key trainees who had been successful on employment training and on youth training courses. Their delight at having got their qualifications and their tribute to the course that had taken them through were a welcome corrective to the rubbish on employment training and on youth training which is spoken in the House day after day by Opposition Members. If I am not mistaken, the Labour party's contribution to youth training would be to abolish it.

We also need to praise the provision in the Budget that has given tax relief to people who buy their own training. That change is long overdue. For far too long, individuals have regarded training as something that should be provided for them by the employer or by the state. Everything that we can do to encourage people to take individual responsibility for that is essential.

As my right hon. and learned Friend would expect, I must tell him that I am disturbed by the threat hanging over some high quality provision from voluntary organisations. I hope that even at this late stage more can be done to help.

The young homeless need to be helped back to work. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether there is any scope for using the employment offices to which such people go as their accommodation address. It is nonsense for young people to find themselves caught because they have no address and can get no benefit. If they can get no benefit, they find it difficult to get a job because they do not have an address. That is bureaucratic nonsense and we must be able to overcome it.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rowe: If I have misunderstood, as my right hon. and learned Friend suggests, I am delighted.

9.49 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): We have had a short and truncated debate, but one that was worth having. The statements made before the debate arise out of the Budget and the country will be able to judge the Government's inadequacies as a result of those statements and this debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) who, while not being as succinct as he usually is, this evening spelt out what the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors told the Select Committee. What they said is completely different from what the Government would have us believe that these bodies think about the economy.

I listened to the Secretary of State for Employment in amazement because what he said was "Through the Looking Glass" stuff. Everything in the garden is lovely, there is more training than ever before and more jobs, we are facing the problems of success—where have we heard that phrase before?

Mr. Blair: The Secretary of State has been biting the wrong mushroom.

Dr. Marek: Yes, he may have been biting the wrong mushroom.

We should look at last year's Red Book to see the forecast. These figures have been given before, and I make no apology for repeating them. Last year growth was estimated at 1·5 per cent. in the first half of 1991, but now the forecast is for a fall of 2 per cent. Last year, the Red Book forecast an increase in manufacturing output of 0·75 per cent.; the latest forecast is that it will fall by 5 per cent. Last year, fixed investment was forecast to decline, but not

[Dr. Marek]

by much—0·75 per cent.—and now the expectation is of a decline of 9·75 per cent. This is the second worst recession since the war.

No amount of gloss from Ministers will convince one of my constituents that the Government have got it right. Every day, the evening newspaper sets out job losses, losses in training places, general gloom and despondency. Until interest rates fall and the Government do something for employment, as opposed to saying that they will do something while in practice doing little, my constituents will remain unconvinced.

The training programme has been cut by £240 million. At some time in the future, £20 million will be returned, as a result of the Budget, but everyone in my constituency knows that there have been cuts. Great publicity has been given to the difficulties of students who have been on courses. To be fair, the training and enterprise councils are saying that the courses are finished, and that is a good thing, but many trainees do not know if they will get qualifications or whether they will be able to continue their courses.

I have a serious point about this Budget that is exemplified by an article on the front page of *The Times* today, which is headed:

"No tax cuts for four years, Lamont hints."

The Conservative party is keen to tell us that it has been cutting taxes ever since it came into office, but what it means is that income taxes have been cut. Ten or 11 years ago, income tax rates were higher, with a basic rate of 33p.

Mr. Howard: What is the Labour party's policy?

Dr. Marek: The Secretary of State knows perfectly well that Labour party policy is to have a range of income tax rates based on the amount of money that people earn. That is a fair principle that has somehow escaped the Conservative party in relation to the poll tax until, miraculously, this afternoon.

Taxation as a percentage of gross domestic product has been consistently higher under this Administration, since 1979, and it will continue to be so.

Under the previous Labour Government it was only about 33 or 34 per cent.—quite a low figure. As soon as the Conservative Administration came into office, the figure shot up to 38 or 39 per cent. The people of Britain will now realise what we mean by the phase, "taxation as a percentage of gross domestic product", because VAT will increase from 15 to 17·5 per cent. Traders will put prices up and the excuse will be that VAT has risen.

If the article in *The Times* reported the Chancellor of the Exchequer correctly, there is no prospect of taxation being brought down. The Conservative party is a party of high taxation. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, it is. The forecasts are that taxation as a percentage of GDP will remain at 37 per cent. in the next year. Of course, the poll tax will not have helped in any way. That is why at the next general election the Conservative party will be seen by the electorate for what it is. It is empty of promises, incompetent—as the poll tax farrago has shown—and it will be turfed out justifiably.

9.55 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): This has been an interesting, if somewhat abbreviated, and intimate debate. I should have liked to comment on the speeches of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but clearly there is no time. I reiterate that the Budget, which is designed to help business, has been warmly welcomed by the Confederation of British Industry, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Directors. They all made the point that the Chancellor had listened to what business had to say.

The Budget also helped families by increasing child benefit and it helped the community charge payer. For the information of Opposition Members, a couple receiving the full relief—a total of £280 —on community charge would need to spend £13,000 on standard VAT-rated goods to be worse off.

In debates on the Budget attention has rightly been concentrated on major matters and there is no time to speak about the many imaginative measures in the Budget, including the training measures which add to the £2·7 billion already being spent by the Government on training, the £20 billion being spent by employers and the new measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, on which I congratulate him. There is no time to go into all those measures.

I wish to make one brief announcement which will be welcomed by the House about help for the disabled with their transport needs. It affects coach operators who have responded positively to the needs of disabled persons by fitting up their coaches to carry wheelchairs. Such operators sometimes laid themselves open to a tax penalty because their vehicles no longer had sufficient seats to avoid paying VAT and car tax. I am delighted to be able to say that not only will such operators no longer have to pay car tax and VAT where only the provision of wheelchair space made them liable but that Customs will consider claims for refunds from operators who have been caught and still have the vehicle.

Opposition Members have convenient memories. In their doom-laden comments they forget that while there is, indeed, a recession it comes after a period of unprecedented growth and that in the three years to 1989 business investment rose by 43 per cent. They forget that from 1981 to 1990 the United Kingdom economy grew by almost 30 per cent. and that in the same period unemployment fell by 1·5 million and jobs increased by 3·25 million. They forget that more people of working age are at work in the United Kingdom than in any other European Community member state. Moreover, they forget that unemployment increased under each and every Labour Government since the war.

Last night we were treated to an impressive and enjoyable display of the operatic knowledge of the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). We were all greatly impressed by the extent of his knowledge. But tonight the utterances of Opposition Members reminded me of quite another song—Noel Coward's "There are bad times just around the corner".

The Budget has helped business, families, the community charge payer, the disabled and the environment, and it means that good times are just around the corner for Britain and for the Government. The bad times

round the corner will be for the Opposition. They long for an election, but so do we, because when it comes we know that the electorate will see the Opposition's outworn and unconvincing policies for what they are.

Debate adjourned.—[Mr. Boswell.]

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Auxiliary Coastguard Service

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): It is almost eight years since I made my maiden spech on the controversial subject of coastguard reorganisation—and at that time the Chamber was as full as it is now, that also being an Adjournment debate.

The debate that I am now initiating is about the review which the Government plan to put in hand into the whole question of the sectoral organisation of Her Majesty's coastguard, and particularly the auxiliary coastguard service. I made my maiden speech against the background of the Penlee disaster and, of course, the Penlee lifeboat was based in my constituency. After that disaster there was considerable concern about the reorganisation of the coastguard service in the south-west and especially in Cornwall.

In my maiden speech I asked for certain assurances, particularly about the retention of regular manning of the three remaining look-outs manned by auxiliaries in my constituency. The manning arrangements for those look-outs are unique because they are the only ones in the country that are regularly manned. The three look-outs are at Gwenap head, which is near Land's End and is manned for 24 hours a day every day of the year, the Lizard, which is manned for 12 hours a day, and St. Ives, which is manned for six to eight hours a day.

In reply to that debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), who was then the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport, assured me that I would be given prior warning of any change that was contemplated in the manning arrangements of those look-outs. In accordance with that pledge, my hon. Friend the present Minister for Shipping, who I am glad to say will reply to this debate, wrote to me on 23 January saying that there was now a possibility that regular manning would be stopped at those three look-out stations. He told me that a few days later he would announce in a written answer that there had been an internal review into the auxiliary coastguard station and that there was a question mark over the future of the three look-out stations.

I informed my hon. Friend right away of my total opposition to the possible abolition of regular manning at those stations. I base my argument for their retention on the simple fact that by any yardstick my constituency is remarkably exposed and has a very dangerous coastline. That fact is emphasised by another fact, that there are five major deep sea lifeboats—not rubber duck lifeboats—in my constituency. That is far more than in any other constituency in Britain. This all stems from the geographical position of the constituency, which juts out into the Atlantic and takes in the Isles of Scilly, Land's End, the Lizard and quite a large slice of the north coast of Cornwall.

As a result of the warning that the Minister kindly gave me, in accordance with the pledge, I was able to alert local people and others to the threat hanging over these three look-outs, and to the fact that a review was in progress. A few days later that review was announced in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) in what can only be described as a rather bland

[Mr. David Harris]

reply, in which the Minister said that he had deposited in the Library an eight-page summary of the internal review document.

I would not quarrel with parts of the document. I am not arguing that it was not necessary to hold such a review. From time to time in any organisation it makes sense to see how it is working. I am, however, certainly arguing against one of its recommendations—about the three look-outs I have mentioned—and I certainly want to ask questions about the way in which the review has been and is being conducted.

Because I drew local attention to the situation, I received many letters, as did my hon. Friend the Minister, and as did the regional controller of the coastguard, Commander David Eliot. I pay tribute to him; he has a job to do and I do not mean in any way to criticise him.

I have had letters from honorary secretaries of lifeboats in my constituency. I have received many letters from the sea fish industry committee of the county council, from fishermen, from the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation and from the South West Hand Liners Association. Fishermen are extremely worried about the proposals for the look-outs and about the review in general.

I have also had letters from all the councils involved —from, for instance, St. Ives town council, which was aghast at suggestions that the busy holiday town of St. Ives might lose its look-out, which keeps a weather eye on what is happening at sea and on what is happening to the holiday beaches of the town. There have been four fatalities in St. Ives this year alone. The holiday industry there is dismayed by the prospect of anything happening to the look-out or of its hours being reduced.

Others are also worried about the operation. As the weeks have gone by other hon. Members have become aware of it, I suspect partly because of representations from the auxiliary coastguards to the effect that such a move was afoot. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) in his place. I hope that he wil be able to catch the Chair's eye later to voice the concerns of his constituency.

I am convinced that if I had not been granted my previous Adjournment debate or been given my pledge some years ago, much of this would have happened without people knowing it. I am sorry to say that even now we do not know the full details of what is being contemplated. In a series of written questions I asked the Minister if he would place in the Library a copy of the full document of the internal review. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will change his mind tonight and will make that document available to hon. Members in the Library.

I hope that, once the regional controllers put forward their detailed proposals on how to implement the review —that is the task that they have been given—hon. Members and others will be told exactly what is being proposed. I am sorry to say that my hon. Friend the Minister felt that he could not agree to that. He said, perfectly reasonably, that it is not usual for the advice of civil servants or officials to be made public and I understand that. However, my plea tonight is that he will change the Government's attitude toward the conduct of the review that he hopes to implement within a couple of months.

People must be told exactly what the Government have in mind. I do not mean simply the proposals in the intial document but what will be proposed by the regional controllers, what my hon. Friend the Minister decides as a result of those proposals, and what will happen to the structure of the auxiliary coastguard service. Some 4,400 auxiliaries, who are dedicated volunteers, are now stationed around the coastline of the United Kingdom. I do not know—my hon. Friend the Minister says that he does not know either—how many will be in place once the review has been implemented. I am sure that their number will be reduced, and I suspect that the reduction could be considerable.

According to the summary document, the review recommends that the deployment of auxiliaries should be changed. It rightly says that the present disposition is largely based on historical factors. In many areas, the position has probably changed but it is being suggested that, instead of companies of auxiliaries placed with some frequency around the coastline, a fast response team of two or four men would go out and assess emergencies. There would also be a back-up team that could be called out for serious emergencies. I suspect that there may be a very long coastline between one back-up team and the next, and that it may take some time to summon sufficient response to serious emergencies.

It is the job of regional controllers to make detailed proposals, and it is imperative that all interested and concerned organisations should know exactly what is being proposed before my hon. Friend the Minister makes his final decision. In statements earlier today, other Ministers said that they had consulted widely on matters of great importance to the country's future. I hope that there will be wide consultation on this matter so that people can give their expert judgment on the suggestions.

People should be consulted not just because it makes good sense but because my hon. Friend the Minister knows perfectly well that past reorganisation of the coastguard service has been highly emotive and controversial. I do not need to remind him, for example, of the recent controversy over the closure of the Hartland coastguard station. I am desperately afraid that, unless he adopts an open approach on this issue, people will be, and may have good grounds for being, suspicious about it. Therefore, it is in everyone's best interests for my hon. Friend the Minister to adopt the open approach that I am advocating tonight.

The auxiliaries are dedicated volunteers who are paid little money but care desperately and passionately about the service that they provide. They are in a difficult position because they rightly feel that they cannot speak out. It is to their credit that they have not gone rushing off to the papers to spread scare stories; they are highly responsible men and women. I have contacts with them and I know how responsible they are and how some of them feel about what might be in the air.

I do not think it is fair on the auxiliaries or their officers, particularly the regional controllers, to be the subject of unfair criticism over the review. Therefore, I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister to hide nothing and, once he has received the advice and recommendations of the regional controllers and made up his mind on how the review should be implemented, will tell not just Members of Parliament, but the public, certainly those who feel strongly about this issue, who should know exactly what is being proposed. My hon. Friend the Minister has been

kind enough to offer me, and no doubt other hon. Members, meetings to discuss the matter. I do not want us to be presented with a fait accompli through a written answer.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has listened carefully, and I hope, with confidence, that he will heed what I have said tonight. I believe that I am speaking for many people, many hon. Members and, more importantly, for all those people around the coastline who regard the coastguard service as an absolute necessity and believe that any changes made to its organisation and structure should be approached with the greatest care and completed in a totally open manner.

10.17 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I thank the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) for giving me the opportunity to speak now and for raising the issue in the House, having won the opportunity to debate it. It is an important issue that, ultimately, boils down to life saving. I heartily endorse everything that the hon. Gentleman has said tonight and about which he has been campaigning for some time.

I have some direct experience of the situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency because I was present and summoned the rescue services to a drowning on the other side of St. Ives bay some years ago when I was 16. The person was taken out of the water alive but, sadly, died later in hospital. That incident gave me a direct appreciation of exactly what goes on in such circumstances.

The essential point being put tonight relates to the three look-out posts. They are not in my constituency and I can simply support what the hon. Gentleman said. More generally, the debate deals with the nature of the review that is taking place. My concern relates partly to my constituency but also to national issues. It is not so long since the awful situation in north Devon raised considerable concern. People are worried whenever there is perceived to be a threat to the local service and the local knowledge that it provides in emergencies.

The case in the Mevagissey district which hit the headlines was precisely the same as that just described, but nothing was made public officially. Information began to come out in dribs and drabs about what was to be proposed. First, we were told that the look-out post would go. I now understand that it will remain at Mevagissey, but with a 50 per cent. cut in manning levels on that section of coast and a 50 per cent. extension of the area of coast to be covered. That naturally makes the coastguards concerned about the question of rapid response, particularly given their current aim for a 20-minute response time. They are now told that the target will be 30 minutes. I understand that Ministers hope to even up as well as down, so that the 30-minute response time will apply everywhere. Currently, it does not exist in every area, but naturally in a district where the response time is estimated to be 20 minutes an increase in that time is a matter of considerable concern.

I hope that the Minister will respond to the point that the hon. Member for St. Ives made that any proposals should be made openly so that people know what is going on and can express their concerns locally before finding out that an announcement has been made.

10.19 pm

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): First and foremost, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on securing this Adjournment debate. I am aware of the deep feelings in his constituency about the coastguard service and of his great interest in the service.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Penlee lifeboat disaster, which had a tremendous effect on the nation and lives in its mind. In the few minutes remaining, I should like to answer as many points as possible that my hon. Friend made.

I was surprised by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) saying that information leaked out in dribs and drabs. The review was carried out, and when I released it to the trade unions I felt it right to answer a question in the House and place a summary of the recommendations in the Library. I thought that the summary went some way to answering some of the points, but I will deal with the specific point that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives made.

Before discussing the review's findings, it may be helpful to explain what the sector organisation is and how it relates to the rest of the coastguard service.

The primary function of the coastguard is to provide a maritime search and rescue co-ordination service by maintaining 24-hour radio distress and 999 emergency telephone watch at 21 centres around the United Kingdom. From those stations, the majority of emergency incidents are co-ordinated, using whatever rescue resources are available to the coastguard from a variety of sources. That is an important point. That aspect of the coastguard's role is not covered in the review.

The sector and auxiliary organisation represents another arm of the service that provides on-the-spot coastal support to operational centres, with about 100 full-time sector officers supported, as my hon. Friend said, by 4,500 auxiliary coastguard volunteers. That aspect of the service was under review.

The auxiliary coastguards are volunteers, but normally they are called out for only a few hours each month for exercises or training. They provide an ever-ready band of enthusiastic men and women who unstintingly give their time to assist the regular coastguard service. Although they are only one component of the United Kingdom's search and rescue organisation, they remain a valuable asset in providing an essential coastal response and local knowledge. I join my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives in paying tribute to their unstinting and important work for our coastguard service.

The sector and auxiliary organisation was set up following the reorganisation of the coastguard, as recommended by the Lavers report of 1974. The number of sectors and the size and location of auxiliary companies, which were established mainly to man breeches buoy rescue equipment, undoubtedly met the requirements of the day, but the situation on the coastline has changed in the intervening years. There has been a marked decrease in the number of vessels that, formerly, were wrecked around our coasts, but an increase in the number of leisure-related incidents involving holidaymakers and pleasure craft. The requirement to rescue stranded mariners by breeches buoy has been replaced by the greater availability of all-weather helicopters and fast lifeboats. In some cases, it must be

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

accepted that the disposition, size and coverage provided by the coastguard coastal sector organisation is based on historical rather than current requirements.

I therefore consider that the review is timely and will give an opportunity to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the coastguard's response in meeting current requirements. As my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives said, there were several aspects of the review with which no one would argue, such as setting out the role of the coastguard and trying to achieve more regular response times.

The review is wide ranging in its scope. It considers the coastguard's coastal commitments, responsiveness, the sector organisation, the sector officer's tasks, the coastguard auxiliary service, transport, both ashore and afloat, equipment including communications equipment, training requirements, and associated administrative functions and methodology.

The coastal commitments of the coastguard have evolved over the years. Currently, they consist of an amalgam of statutory duties, non-statutory duties, habitual and traditional tasks. The role and objectives of the service need to be clarified and widely promulgated. Accordingly, the review addresses those issues.

Future requirements for manpower and equipment cannot be determined without target performance standards. The time from call-out to achieving a presence on scene depends on a variety of factors, including local geography, population density, potential for incidents and their frequency and the availability of other emergency resources. It will be appreciated that some of those factors are not necessarily quantifiable. I shall therefore be looking for a result that is realistic and practical. The review recommends certain response criteria which will provide a base line for assessing whether coverage is satisfactory in each area around the coastline.

Our coastline varies and different responses are needed. At some times of the year, a tremendous number of holidaymakers visit St. Ives and at other times of the year it is not so busy. We must get the balance right. I accept the importance of this issue to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and of the hon. Member for Truro.

The local knowledge of sector officers, coupled with their operational availability and expertise, is an essential part of the coastal response and will continue to be so. The review examines their job description and draws attention to the fact that, although some officers are fully stretched, others could accept a greater range of tasks with no detriment to the service. This is therefore one of the matters that regional controllers will assess.

Auxiliary coastguards form a vital part of the coastguard service. Auxiliary coastguards, both men and women, undertake a wide variety of tasks on a voluntary basis to serve the local community and the mariner at large. Some auxiliaries are trained to work as radio operators in operation centres, but with the demise of the breeches buoy, the majority are now organised into teams trained in cliff and mud rescue techniques and shoreline searches and trained to provide vital intelligence as well as providing on-the-spot co-ordination when necessary. In some cases, the size and location of these teams is still based on historical, rather than current, requirements, so regional controllers are now examining where coverage needs to be improved to meet the response criteria and, conversely, where savings could be made.

The important issue of look-outs worries my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives. The Lavers report concluded that a visual distress watch was not cost-effective, with only a very small percentage of incidents observed directly by coastguards from fixed look-outs. Since the end of the 1970s most of those look-outs have been phased out and the coastguard has maintained radio distress watch at its operations centres, the remainder of reports being received from the 999 emergency telephone system.

However, in casualty risk situations and in special circumstances, some form of visual watch may still be necessary. Rather than rely upon fixed look-outs with restricted areas of visibility, this need can perhaps best be satisfied by the use of fast response vehicles with appropriate radio communications and rescue equipment able to travel quickly to those parts of the coastline which a fixed look-out is unable to cover. The review therefore recommends reconsideration of the case for retaining the three fixed look-outs.

The review also considers whether the payment of out-of-pocket expenses to auxiliaries can be improved and simplified. It is also appreciated that there is need for auxiliary coastguards to be recognised by the public at large while performing their essential duties. An examination of the uniform requirements is therefore to be undertaken.

The review is a consultation document. No decision has been taken. I have insisted on full consultation at local level with interested parties before recommendations to implement the review are made. This process is under way nationwide. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives feels that there has been some secrecy. There should not have been any secrecy and I would deeply regret it if that had occurred. I intended to make the review as widely available as possible, which is why I published the summary.

Since the review was published in January, my officials have received a large number of contributions, most of which have been constructive. Understandably, many people wish to be assured that there will be no reduction in the coastguard's ability to provide an adequate response to emergencies along our coastline. It is also pleasing to note that, in general, the review has been welcomed by the coastguard service as a whole, which sees it as providing a sensible framework on which to build for the future.

I look forward to receiving the advice of coastguard regional controllers—through the Chief Coastguard—on how the review findings may be applied to their particular region. I have already agreed to meet my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and other hon. Members before I make a decision, which will probably be in June.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives asked me to put a full copy of the review in the Library. I did not do so in the first place because it went into a lot of technical detail. Following my hon. Friend's strenuous representations, I shall certainly place a full copy in the Library.

I know that the House reaffirms its support for our coastguard system. We must all ask ourselves how to provide the best service and the best coastal rescue system for our entire coastline. There is a lot of it. It varies and different responses are needed in different areas. I hope that, with the commitment of my hon. Friend the Member

for St. Ives and other hon. Members, we will get it right so that we have the best possible coastguard service, meeting the needs of all the constituencies along our coastline and of all those constituents who use our coast and may need to use our coastguard service.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 22 March 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance (Publicity for Auditors' Reports) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 established the Audit Commission as an independent body to appoint external auditors to certain bodies, including local authorities, and to help those bodies to ensure that they provided their services economically, efficiently and effectively. The commission's role was extended to cover the national health service from October 1990 by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

The Local Government Finance Act imposes certain duties on an auditor of a local authority or other body, which he discharges in accordance with the published code of audit practice, independently of both the Audit Commission and Ministers. A copy of the latest code of audit practice, approved by both Houses of Parliament late last year, is now on the book.

In carrying out an audit, the auditor must satisfy himself as to the propriety and regularity of the accounts, and must satisfy himself that the body concerned has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. But auditors are precluded from making general judgments about the merits of particular policies and programmes.

The key to all this is of course the independence of auditors in carrying out their duties, so that they can do so without political interference in the affairs of the local authority or body concerned.

Under section 15(3) of the 1982 Act, the auditor is also required to consider whether he should make a report on any matter that comes to his attention while carrying out the audit, so that it may be considered by the body concerned or brought before the attention of the public. Such reports are known as auditors' public interest reports, and the auditor is required to consider whether they should be prepared and sent to a body immediately —an auditor's immediate report—or at the conclusion of the audit.

Section 18(3) to (6) of the 1982 Act set out the arrangements for consideration of the public interest report and its disclosure. Essentially, the procedure is that the report is sent by the auditor to the authority concerned, and the authority must then take the report into consideration as soon as practicable. The authority is required to include the report among the documents open for inspection by the public before the meeting at which the report is to be considered. Section 18(5) of the 1982 Act also provides that the report shall be open to the public for inspection for six years after that meeting.

The main problem with the existing law is that, because the present requirement is that an immediate report shall be taken into consideration by the body only as soon as practicable, that effectively means that the contents of the report may not be publicly available until some months after its issue. Even then, it is published only in the sense that it comprises part of the papers for a council meeting. The fact that an immediate report has been produced may not be widely known and, in extreme cases, may not be known at all.

The committee of inquiry into the conduct of local authority business, the Widdicombe inquiry, considered the arrangements for the publicity of auditors' public interest reports. The inquiry's report made a number of proposals for improving publicity. In particular, it was recommended that the chief executive of the local authority should be placed under a duty immediately to notify all members of the body of the receipt of a report in the public interest; to provide a copy of any such report to members on request and to make copies available to the public for inspection.

In the White Paper "The Government's Response to the Widdicombe Report of Inquiry", the Government proposed to go further and to make legislative changes to require that on receipt of an auditor's report, the chief finance office must forthwith send copies to all councillors; copies must be available immediately for public inspection at times and places to be advertised; the auditor must take such steps as he considers necessary to publicise his findings and finally, he must also make copies available to the public for a suitable fee and send copies to councillors if, for any reason, the chief finance officer does not act as required under the previous recommendations.

Those proposals have been further revised in the light of recent experience and following discussions with the Audit Commission. It is now proposed that the duty to publish a public interest report should be placed on the body concerned rather than on the chief finance officer, and that is what the Bill sets out to achieve. The reason is that not all such bodies are formally required to have a chief finance officer, and there may be cases where the report is critical of the chief finance officer. In that case, he would not be the most appropriate person to be given such responsibility.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) for the clear and helpful way in which he is setting out the terms of the Bill. He is doing that with the care that I would expect from someone who knows as much about local government as my hon. Friend does.

My hon. Friend said earlier that there are certain things that the auditor is precluded from investigating and he is now describing the publication of immediate public interest reports. Should the auditor be precluded from considering those things that he is precluded from considering? Would publication of some of those things which the auditor is precluded from considering be a good thing in the public interest?

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend has made a valid point, but that point ranges much wider than this narrow and simple proposal, as befits such a modest Bill that came 14th in the ballot. I do not want to open up what might be a more controversial subject.

With regard to local authorities, it is the auditor's job to examine what has been done and judge whether it has been done properly, efficiently and in the public interest. It is not his job to look behind what has been done to the policies. That is what we elect councillors for. If the auditor had to give an opinion, that would probably remove his complete independence from the politics of local government which is probably his most valuable asset as he moves from local authority to local authority examining what is happening and deciding whether the money has been well spent or wasted. He does not move from authority to authority asking himself whether he would have decided to spend money in the way that the authority has spent it. That is a wider issue and it touches on the heart of the independence of local auditors and of audit in central Government, through the National Audit Office.

The auditors consider whether a particular project has been handled properly; they do not consider the politics behind it. If I had included that wider examination in the Bill, I would have been speaking to a rather larger audience, and I also doubt whether the Bill would have passed through Standing Committee with the facility that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and I managed to achieve so skilfully.

In the interests of defining the scope of the Bill as tightly as possible, and preventing boarders to a Bill with a wider scope, I must stress that it applies only to auditors' immediate public interest reports. It does not apply to them in general. Where the auditor chooses to await the completion of the audit before making a public interest report, he will do so because the need for action and disclosure is less pressing. In other words, if the Bill is enacted, the auditor will have to judge whether the situation that he finds during an overall audit is so urgent and glaring that he must report on it immediately, or whether he decides that it can wait until he produces the main body of his report. The immediate report does not fall within the scope of the present law, perhaps because the circumstances were not properly foreseen; that is the narrow point which the Bill addresses.

The existing provisions of the 1982 Act are considered sufficient for an overall report. If the auditor considers it appropriate, he can make a report immediately, whereupon the changes that I am proposing in the Bill would apply. The Bill is designed to entitle the public to see an auditor's immediate public interest report, to copy it and to be supplied with a copy at reasonable cost. It requires the body concerned upon which the auditor has reported to advertise the report and provide for sanctions comparable to those in the current provisions of the 1982 Act—if the local authority concerned fails to comply with what I hope very shortly will become law. It also gives the auditor some fallback powers to ensure that, even if all those provisions fail, he can make his report known.

There is much talk about open government, and over the past 11 years we have, little by little, achieved rather more open government that we had before. The Bill is a small, modest but very necessary step towards providing more opportunities for the public to know sooner rather than later what the independent scrutineers of local authority action—and sometimes inaction—are examining. I am happy to say that after discussions with the Opposition Front Bench and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) the Labour party is in full agreement with this small, but fairly significant, step towards open government. In the spirit of co-operation that is newly rife in the House on many local government matters, I am delighted to commend the Bill to the House.

9.48 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on securing his place in the ballot—it is three places above mine—and on introducing this important Bill, which has reached this advanced stage after only two minutes' scrutiny in Committee. That tells us two things. First, as my hon. Friend said, there is complete agreement on the need for and merit of the measure. Secondly, it is valuable to consider Bills on Report on Fridays when there is an opportunity to talk a little longer about measures. I stress the word "little" to assure my hon. Friend, because he has a train to catch.

I congratulate my hon. Friend also on the timing of this further stage, because the whole world, let alone the whole country, must be aware that we have a little difficulty within Parliament with regard to the future structure and financing of local government.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Surely not.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend the Minister says, "Surely not." There is a matter of interpretation of the "we". I made the point that there was all-party support for the measure, and there is an all-party problem about how to pay for local government. We in Parliament have a little difficulty. I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that I was not referring to the Government in isolation.

Interestingly enough, my constituency annual general meeting is to be held tomorrow morning. I recall the occasion last year when we were about to implement the community charge as a means of introducing more accountability in local government. Some of my constituents and Conservative party activists were a little nervous about what the community charge was likely to do for our electoral fortunes. I said to them that there is no soft option on how to pay for local government. I tell my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire that there is no soft option, either, on how to make local government more accountable. His Bill is one of many steps in achieving that accountability.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) may have been extremely concerned, as I was, by the intervention yesterday by our right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) when he referred to the statement of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment being made on the Ides of March. The point that concerned me is that the Ides of March is 15 March, not 21 March. When I was at school I learned the rhyme, "March, July, October, May makes nones the seventh, Ides the fifteenth day." If our right hon. Friend was incorrect in that respect, would he also be incorrect in other parts of his intervention?

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am grateful to him for raising that point. Some people may say that our right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was wrong about one or two other matters as well.

Mr. Mates: Hear, hear.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire gives a loud chorus of support. I congratulate him also not only on securing the passage of this measure, which the House will wholeheartedly support today, but on nearly persuading me back in 1987 and early 1988—one of our conversations was in a London taxi in a traffic jam—that there was a fatal flaw in our community charge arrangements and that we should put something into the system that would take account of people's ability to meet the demands of local government finance. I was not persuaded of his argument then, because I felt that his suggestion would not work.

However, my hon. Friend deserves congratulations on having raised that matter and on contributing to the argument that has brought the measure to this stage. It is to the credit of the Government that we were positive in introducing a measure that was designed to improve the accountability of local government and to broaden the base of those who should pay for local government. I am in no doubt that those two measures have been successful. I do not believe that anybody wants to return to a system in which a small number of people pay for local government while many people who enjoy the benefits of local government pay absolutely nothing.

As this measure and the 1982 legislation, which the Bill would amend, contribute to local government accountability, we should take the opportunity to remind ourselves that accountability works at two levels. First, it works at the level of the electorate. If a local authority achieves economy, efficiency and effectiveness, that should be visible in the charges that it levies on its electorate when it sets a charge, whether it be the community charge, the new local services tax or whatever—even the old rating system.

It is quite interesting—this is a partisan point—that in my part of the world, north Yorkshire and east Yorkshire, North Yorkshire county council is levying, through the districts, I accept, a community charge of £140 less than in the neighbouring county of Humberside, which is a Labour authority. That is notwithstanding that the Government, in their infinite generosity, have given the people of Humberside a larger grant than they have given the people of North Yorkshire. It cannot be said against us that we have fixed the figures in favour of North Yorkshire. Indeed, members of my district council in Ryedale say that the figures have been firmly fixed against part of North Yorkshire. Year after year, even under the old rating system as much as under the community charge, we have seen Government grant scraped from the shire districts and put into inner-London areas and boroughs such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), where there is a greater need to spend.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My constituents would be most concerned to hear that they had been moved to inner London. Many of them prefer to consider themselves in Essex.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting me straight on that matter. The surburban sprawl of London, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire said, causes us to be a little hazy about geography and where county boundaries start. In the light of what my hon. Friend has said, the people of Wanstead and Woodford are extremely fortunate to be in the county of Essex rather than in the borough of Haringey, which is not much further down the road. They can see, just as people in Wandsworth and Lambeth can see, that economy, efficiency and effectiveness—the prerequisites that local authorities should set out to achieve—are very visible in the charges that are levied from one borough to the next. That is a formidable argument for moving towards a form of unitary authority. In North Yorkshire, we are likely to have an interesting debate about whether we should be run by North Yorkshire county council or the district councils.

Without widening the debate, if it turned out that the county council was abolished, I would urge my hon. Friend the Minister to resist tinkering too much with district council boundaries. Many of my constituents in rural Ryedale would not take kindly to their local affairs being dominated by the urban needs of York or of Scarborough. It would be a worry were we to carve up the district council map in North Yorkshire.

I said that there are two levels at which accountability is achieved. One is the electorate, and the second is clearly the proper scrutiny of local authority accounts. We cannot expect the ordinary man in the street to do that. That is why it is right for independent auditors, who make no judgment on the policies that are being implemented, to have a duty to ensure that everything has been done that should be done to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

There is one area in which the Audit Commission, in an umbrella sense, and the individual independent auditor who is looking into the affairs of a local authority, can build on Government policy over the past two or three years, and where such scrutiny is crucial. I refer to competitive tendering. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows only too well, many allegations have been made, right across the country, that local authorities have fixed the competitive tendering process in favour of their in-house labour forces, and have not given outside or private firms a fair crack of the whip.

I must stress that I am not bringing any evidence to my hon. Friend that that practice exists in my constituency, because I believe that Ryedale district council has been one of the authorities that have led the way in implementing Government policy. It built a Chinese wall within the district, saying, "We shall have a team from the authority to scrutinise what the in-house capability is doing, and another team to scrutinise what the private-sector firm is doing." That policy has been largely successful. From his reaction to what I have just said, it appears that my hon. Friend has taken that important point firmly on board. No organisation apart from the independent auditor is capable of checking that practice.

It is vital that any adverse report should be brought out into the public domain immediately. That is why the Bill is so important, and why I am glad to have the opportunity of supporting it this morning. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire once again on his Bill.

[Mr. Greenway]

There is, of course, so much more that one could say about the future of local government at this important time because it is at a watershed. For many years, we have heard the cry that local authorities have been spending more than they should and have been involving themselves in affairs that are beyond their purpose. The local government commission, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment referred to yesterday, which will consider the structure of local government and what the local authorities should deliver, is the right approach.

The open way in which my right hon. Friend has shown that he is prepared to consult not only the parties in the House, but as many local authorities and local authority organisations as possible is an admirable approach. The local authority organisations and the electorate will be asked, "Tell us what you want from local government. Tell us how you want it structured." My right hon. Friend has decided what needed to be decided—that, in two years, we shall have a different system of paying for local government. In the meantime, there will be a greater sense of fairness about community charge payments, because they will have been substantially reduced by the bold measure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget statement on Tuesday.

However, none of that is enough, because underlying all those things must be a proper structure for the professional scrutiny of what local authorities do. Whether we have a community charge, a local services tax or any other scheme that another political party may suggest, there must be proper scrutiny. The independent auditor has a part to play. If something wrong or untoward is found, it should be brought out into the open at once. That is why the Bill is so important for the future of local government.

10.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): If the atmosphere in the Chamber is not as charged this morning as it was 18 hours ago, we are nevertheless discussing another aspect of local government finance with sober diligence. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on successfully steering his Bill through its various stages to its Third Reading today. Although it is a short Bill, its shortness should not blind us to its importance.

In his interesting and important speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) raised several points which I should like to discuss immediately. As he said, we scrutinised the Bill in Committee for only two minutes. That was not because we were neglecting to do our duty, but because there was all-party agreement about what we were trying to achieve. I have had considerable discussions in Committee and elsewhere with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and there is no doubt that he and all parties realise the importance of a proper audit of local authority affairs. We welcome that——

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is sorry not to be in his place this morning. Given the momentous news of this week, I am sure that the Minister will realise that my hon. Friend has many other extremely important tasks relating to the debate about local government. I have been asked to stand in, and am delighted to do so. Of course, I and all my colleagues give our wholehearted support to this important Bill.

Mr. Key: I am most grateful to the hon. Lady, and very much welcome her presence in the Chamber today. I fully understand that the hon. Member for Brightside has busy commitments elsewhere——

Mr. Mates: Burying shot foxes.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend says, "Burying shot foxes" —how uncharitable. I doubt whether there are any foxes in Sheffield, but there may be some urban foxes.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) made an important contribution to the debate on local government. Perhaps his error in suggesting that yesterday was the Ides of March had something to do with his schooling. I am, of course, entirely prejudiced in this matter, having had the pleasure and the honour of teaching at Harrow school for 14 years, but my right hon. Friend went to Eton which, I was told by my pupils, was known as "the drain in the plain", while the establishment at which I taught was known as "the dump on the hump". Nevertheless——

Mr. Arbuthnot: As I too went to Eton, I can assure my hon. Friend that education there has obviously improved since the days of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley).

Mr. Key: I am relieved to hear that. Since I left Harrow school, an enormous amount has happened under the headmastership of Mr. Ian Beer, which has been in line with the traditions of that important and influential educational establishment which still leads the way in much of British education.

I turn now to what the hon. Member for Ryedale said about Humberside and North Yorkshire——

Mr. John Greenway: I am my hon. Friend's hon. Friend.

Mr. Key: Of course—my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend came to see me earlier this year to discuss the level of central Government grant for his area. We had an extremely amicable and detailed discussion. His constituents are lucky to be served by an hon. Member who understands the difficult details of local government finance so well. It is a rare pleasure for a local government finance Minister to have such a detailed and constructive discussion on such an important issue.

My hon. Friend said that some of his constituents may wish to choose in future whether their local government affairs should fall within the ambit of the Humberside or North Yorkshire authorities. That will be a matter for the local government commission, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to set up later in the year.

Mr. John Greenway: I must correct my hon. Friend. there is absolutely no question of people in North Yorkshire wanting anything whatsoever to do with Humberside, except perhaps to join the wake following the scrapping of Humberside, not only as a county council but as a concept. Many of them would much prefer their area to be called East Yorkshire. There is no question of Ryedale or any part of my Ryedale constituency, including the bits which used to be in the old East Riding, wanting

anything to do with Humberside. The point is whether they would choose to be governed by county hall at Northallerton, by North Yorkshire county council or by their own district councils of Ryedale, Hambleton, Scarborough and so on. We are looking forward to the public debate on that.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There should be a public debate on that issue. It is not for me to prejudge it—far from it—but I hear the point that he has made loudly and clearly on behalf of his constituents.

Mr. Arbuthnot: While my hon. Friend is on the subject of counties, the House may remember that my predecessor, now Lord Jenkin, was instrumental in abolishing the Greater London council. I hope that, in moving towards restoring some of the old counties, restoration of the GLC will not necessarily be on my hon. Friend's agenda.

Mr. Key: The London authorities are unitary authorities. Although we shall listen to comments on the future of London authorities, it is unlikely that we shall wish to see substantial change in them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire to discuss what the auditor was precluded from investigation. That is an important point. Paragraph 60 of the code of audit practice says:

"The auditor is able to form an independent and impartial view on how an authority is conducting its affairs."

Those reports are an important means of informing the public. But it is not the function of the auditor to express an opinion on the wisdom of decisions taken by authorities in the lawful exercise of their discretion. It is the auditors' responsibility to consider the effects of policy and to examine the arrangements by which policy decisions are carried out.

As paragraph 39 of the code of practice explains:

"Auditors should consider for example whether policy objectives have been determined and policy decisions taken with appropriate authority."

He has to consider to what extent policy objectives are set and decisions are based on sufficient, relevant and reliable financial and other data, with the critical underlying assumptions made explicit. He also has a duty to consider whether there are satisfactory arrangements for considering alternative options, including the indentification, selection and evaluation of such options. He must consider whether established policy aims and objectives have been clearly set out, whether subsequent decisions on the implementation of policy are consistent with the approved aims and objectives and have been taken with proper authority at the appropriate level, and whether the resultant instructions to staff accord with the approved policy aims and decisions and are clearly understood by those concerned.

All that adds up to the Government's desire that local government should carry out its duties as efficiently as possible, that local councillors should be aware of their responsibility for policy making, and that the management decisions of local authorities should be of the highest quality. The auditor has a most important role to play in all that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale mentioned competitive tendering. As part of their work, auditors examine the arrangements made by councils under the compulsory competitive tendering regime. Indeed, auditors have been critical of the way in which many authorities have acted. Several public interest reports have been issued by auditors on that subject. In the light of one such report, a council reconsidered its earlier decision and awarded the contract to the external private company which had submitted the lowest tender. There is an important role for auditors there.

I should perhaps make it clear that, when I refer to a local authority auditor, I do so as a shorthand expression, because the Bill will apply to an auditor appointed under part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Under that Act, auditors are appointed to a range of bodies. The full list of such bodies is given in section 12 of the Act, but they range from a parish meeting through the panoply of what we normally understand by local authorities, including joint committees of them. Other bodies that are subject to the Act include port authorities and land drainage boards. Of course, as clause 1(6) makes clear, the Bill does not apply to health service bodies, but, with that exception, the Bill applies to all the bodies covered by part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend has touched a chord on a matter which it has been in my mind to raise with him for some time. He referred to the auditors of parish meetings. My hon. Friend will have several parishes surrounding the fair city of Salisbury. He will know that parish councils have been a little upset at what they considered to be excessive charges levied by the auditors of their affairs. Can he assure the House that the Government take the complaints of parish councils seriously and that not only the cost of audits but the structure within which they are done will be examined, and, indeed, that parish and town councils will continue to have a substantial role to play in future under whatever structure we end up with?

Mr. Key: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday, we intend to continue to rely on parishes to play a substantial and important role. It is not widely appreciated that, outside the shire districts, about 50 per cent. of the country does not have the advantage of a local parish council. Certain places have a community council. We wish to ensure that the duties of parish councils are not neglected or lost.

Like my hon. Friend, I have many parish councils in my constituency. They vary in size and character enormously. Sometimes, they cover a small number of electors—perhaps even 50 or 100. Another parish council may represent the interests of 12,000 or 15,000 people. Indeed, the largest parish councils represent some 30,000 people. So we certainly cannot ignore parish councils, and nor shall we do so.

On my hon. Friend's point, he may be aware that there is a Bill currently before the House on the subject. The Parish Councils (Access to Information) Bill was introduced by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). It would not be right for me to comment at this stage on what might happen to that Bill. The Government are aware of the importance of proper auditing throughout the local government system.

Today's Bill is particularly relevant to local authorities—using the words "local" and "authorities" in their narrow sense. But it is important for the House to realise that many organisations are involved in the work of the

[Mr. Key]

Audit Commission and local government auditors. I should like to describe something of the work of a local authority auditor so that the importance of the Bill can be seen in context against its proper background. I should also like to answer in detail some of the questions raised by my hon. Friends.

The House will recall that, on 18 January, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), whose interest in and knowledge of the matter is widely acknowledged, initiated a debate on extending the role of the Audit Commission. During my reply to the stimulating ideas put forward by my hon. Friend I had occasion to note some of the duties of appointed auditors. The three duties that I specifically mentioned at that time were, first, to check the regularity and propriety of the authority's accounts and their compliance with statutes and regulations; secondly, to satisfy himself that the authority had made proper arrangements to secure value for money: that is, the three Es, economy, efficiency and effectiveness; and thirdly—to comply with the code of audit practice. I shall come back to that point.

Mr. Arbuthnot: One of the campaigns which our hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) has been assiduously and effectively pursuing has been to involve the National Audit Office in the work of the national health service. My hon. Friend the Minister has already pointed out that the Bill does not apply to health bodies. Would he comment on whether it should perhaps apply to them?

Mr. Key: I might be in danger of repetition of the previous debate if I were to cover that point now, but perhaps I may refer to auditing the health service before I conclude my remarks.

An auditor's duties extend wider than the points that I have mentioned. He must hear objections to the accounts from any local government elector. That is not widely recognised. An auditor must certify completion of the audit and give an opinion on the accounts. He must apply to the court for a declaration where it appears that any item of account is contrary to law. He must certify, where it appears that there has been a loss caused by wilful misconduct or failure to account, the sum or the amount of loss due from the person or persons responsible. Finally, he must hold an extraordinary audit if directed to do so by the commission or the Secretary of State. Those are awesome responsibilities.

Many of those matters are covered by the code of audit practice, as it is usually called. My hon. Friends will recall that, in November 1990, I had the duty of bringing the latest version of the code of audit practice before a Standing Committee of this House. They will also recall that the commission's code—it is the commission's, not the Government's—met with approval from all parties.

The code of audit practice devotes several paragraphs, Nos. 57 to 63, to reports in the public interest. Paragraph 58 includes a dozen sub-paragraphs that deal with the sort of items that might occasion a public interest report. The list is intended not to exclude other possibilities, but to act as an indication of items that, in the commission's view, would warrant a public interest report.

Over the past few years, auditors have made a number of important items the subject of public interest reports. They have frequently been concerned at the failure of authorities to keep arrears under control. Reports frequently highlight problems in management and financial control systems, and where there have been delays in setting rates and balancing accounts. Auditors have had a great deal to say in reports that have drawn attention to the inadequacies of authorities in preparing for the introduction of new legislation and in administering competitive tendering and housing benefit.

In particular cases, the auditor has warned of the grave financial position facing an authority. In such cases, the auditor has advised of the need to bring expenditure into balance with available resources and to avoid the use of costly creative accounting measures. Reports have also related to fraud and other special investigations. Some of those have been recurrent themes in such reports. Others have been particularly prevalent for a time, but have become less so as authorities have taken note of and acted on reports.

That is in the best traditions of following best practice, and it is encouraging to see that the number of reports that auditors have felt it necessary to make has dropped from 89 in 1985-86 to 36 in 1989-90. Over the same period, the subjects covered by reports have declined from 153 to 91. That reflects the excellent work that auditors have done in drawing attention to inadequacies in procedures and encouraging good practice within local government. Ultimately, the responsibility for acting on the findings of reports rests with the local authority concerned. Nevertheless, auditors' reports undoubtedly provide a useful way of promoting economy, efficiency and effectiveness within local government.

I cite as an example a specific case of an auditor's report on a particular council. I am not at liberty to reveal which council it is, not least because I do not know. When auditors produce these reports, they ensure that we cannot know which authority is concerned or its political control. In this particular case, the auditor reported that the council had decided that new software would be required to implement revised housing benefit regulations and had entered into an agreement for the supply of a package which failed to become operational by its original target date. Delays occurred in the delivery of specific computer programmes and in the ability of the company to rectify shortcomings in the software. Software difficulties were exacerbated by the need to upgrade the computer and to relocate the housing benefit section, a faulty computer link and the introduction of a system without full implementation of the intended controls. Consequently, inaccuracies occurred in computer processing, resulting in overpayments of housing benefits totalling £1·2 million.

The auditor reports that problems had arisen because of delays in the delivery of computer programmes, the inability of the software company to rectify faults in its programmes, the implementation of a complex computer system without adequate processing controls and the failure of the new housing benefit system to interact with the council's other accounting systems. The auditor reports that, although appropriate recovery action was taken, a bad debts provision of £375,000 had to be made as a result. The contract with the original software company has since been terminated, and the processing of future housing benefit transactions entrusted to another software company.

The auditor's report was helpful to the authority in learning lessons from the mistakes that arose and in

seeking to avoid their recurrence. As the code of audit practice says, auditors' reports are intended to be constructive rather than condemnatory. The Bill is designed to ensure that such reports are available more quickly and that they are better publicised, so that they become an even more effective tool than at present.

One of the auditor's responsibilities is to satisfy himself that the authority has made proper arrangements for securing value for money. In recent years, when people mention value for money they often do so pejoratively. I hope that the climate in which the term is used is changing, because value for money undoubtedly means value for people. It means getting all possible value from every pound of taxpayers' money spent, whether it is raised locally or centrally. People will benefit if there is good value for money.

Where there is room for improvement, the auditor may consider that a report in the public interest is justified. I shall explain how this process of consideration of value for money within local authorities normally operates. The value-for-money study process starts with a central study on a particular topic resulting in a national commission report and an audit guide. Individual auditors then apply the report to the local circumstances at the individual authorities.

Auditors are expected to discuss their audit plans with their clients. If the particular local circumstances are such that carrying out the full study would be inappropriate, the auditors would either carry out a small-scale study tailored to the particular authority or substitute a more appropriate local project for the national study. The final judgment on whether a project is appropriate rests with the auditor, not the commission or the local authority.

In the last couple of years, the Audit Commission has produced reports concerning primary education, museums, art galleries, support for the arts, sports, parks and open spaces, urban regeneration, among others, as well as various studies relating to the police. For 1991-92, subjects to be studied include the strategic role of local authorities in housing, social services management and highways competition.

Looking further into the future, the commission is proposing to carry out major studies looking at client role management, housing benefit and rent arrears and education for 16 to 19-year-olds. In addition, smaller scale projects are planned which will examine development control, special education needs and further aspects of police work, such as traffic policing.

On 1 October 1990, the Audit Commission became responsible for the audit of the national health service. The duties of an auditor of local authorities apply in large measure to the audit of health authorities and will apply to the audit of the new NHS trusts. The Bill does not apply to health service bodies because of their different constitutional position.

Local authorities are responsible to their electors. Health service bodies are responsible to the Secretary of State, who is in turn responsible to Parliament. That difference in the constitutional position was fully reflected in the debate on the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. The difference is therefore reflected in the changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1982 brought about by the 1990 Act. The health service bodies are now being treated in a way consistent with the earlier debate and decision.

I take one subject more as an example of one of the activities that the Audit Commission is proposing to study, and that is housing benefit and rent arrears. Local government is the conduit for a substantial tranche of central Government's income support in the form of housing benefit. Very large sums are involved.

The efficiency with which councils manage the housing benefit system has implications for the relationship between local and central Government, for the costs borne by councils and for the consequential costs borne by applicants if the system is inefficient. The study will examine how councils deliver this service and will illuminate best practice, but it will also examine the experience of benefit applicants and will track the effect of the benefit system on rent arrears, particularly on the part of council tenants.

Once studies have been produced, auditors will examine the extent to which authorities are taking note of advice. Where authorities have not taken note of the potential for greater value for money identified in such studies, they may consider the matter to be of sufficient importance to merit making a report in the public interest. If the auditor considers such a report should be an immediate report, the Bill would ensure that the auditor's findings immediately reached the public domain.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am concerned about the fact that the Bill makes provision for immediate reports which it does not make for less immediate reports. Will the Minister explain the distinction between the two and say why publicity should apply to one but not to the other?

Mr. Key: I shall be dealing with that important issue. First, I wish to deal with a study that is proposed and which will interest my hon. Friend. I refer to client role management. The need for a client-contractor split has been well rehearsed in commission study work, but the precise details of the contractual relationships have not been set out. Moreover, the character of client structures would bear further analysis. The study will explore the alternative arrangements made by councils to administer contracts and examine the impact of such arrangements on central services, such as the introduction of service level agreements. It will also examine the variety of contractual arrangements, procedures and quality assurance criteria. Although it will be focused on services, the study will endeavour to explore the extent to which ideas, such as quality assurance, have permeated other council services.

The management of education provision for young people aged between 16 and 19 has had to adapt to a number of significant changes in recent years. Those changes include work-related further education funding, the local management of schools and colleges and the fall in the population of that age group. There are likely to be further initiatives nationally in an endeavour to raise participation levels.

It is important to realise the importance of participation levels. Only yesterday, I visited Walworth school, in south London, which has tackled the problem head on and has introduced, with the help of the Government's urban programme and the private sector, an important "world of work" unit into the school. One of the many achievements of that initiative at Walworth school has been to increase participation rates substantially among that crucial age group, and I congratulate the school on that.

[Mr. Key]

The Audit Commission will be studying and exploring the steps that LEAs are taking to cope with present pressures and prepare for new initiatives of that type. It will examine the arrangements made to assess need, to identify the wide range of potential providers locally, and to position authorities' own supply. The study will also explore whether it is possible to construct a "value-added" methodology which could be used to compare the performance of different suppliers.

In addition to those major studies, three smaller-scale projects proposed by the commission include a study into development control. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will be aware of the passions that are aroused by development control in their constituencies. In 1983, the commission published a report, researched by the pre-existing audit inspectorate, on efficiency in development control. There have been some significant changes since then. Moreover, development pressures have been acute at times since that report. The study will re-examine the process. If possible, those authorities studied in 1983 will be revisited so that longitudinal considerations can be taken into account. The study will also explore the trade-off between the efficient processing of applications and the quality of decisions taken.

There is, of course, great public interest in the police and their efficiency. The theme currently being considered by the Audit Commission is aspects of traffic policing. Traffic policing absorbs 12 per cent. of overall police resources and has a significant effect on the average citizen. The management of traffic movements, pedestrian flows and car parking grows ever more difficult as car ownership increases. The study would examine the criteria of value for money in traffic-related policing functions and take into account the contribution which police activity can make to wider environmental and urban management issues.

Mr. John Greenway: The Minister's reference to the police calls to mind two other important issues. First, does he agree that Audit Commission reports into the police force, eight or nine of which have been published, have been effective in showing how the management of the police force and the effectiveness, efficiency and economy criteria can be better delivered?

Secondly, does he agree that if, at some future date, we change the overall structure of the police force—many hon. Members feel that there are too many police forces and that some change in structure may be inevitable—the role of auditors can be an effective way of ensuring that the management of the police force, whatever its structure, is more effective?

Mr. Key: I acknowledge the professional experience and expertise of my hon. Friend in police work. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on responsibilities that come within the purview of the Home Secretary, but I acknowledge the importance of the work done by the Audit Commission and the speedy way in which police forces have reacted, in the interest of their officers and the public whom they serve, in seeking to improve the standard of service they offer, which, by almost any standard, is extremely high.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Following yesterday's statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment, a structural change that could be considered for local government is the removal of the precepting power of the police and the possibility of taking the police into central control, a matter which arouses strong passions. The precepting power of local authorities causes difficulties for local authorities which have no power over how much the police, fire authorities and other bodies spend.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right; the role of joint authorities for police, fire and civil defence is a matter of some concern, and I have met a number of such authorities to discuss their funding position. We do not intend in the review to make any commitments on that type of arrangement for the police, not least because it is a matter of grave constitutional concern that we take great care before considering any changes that might upset the important balance that currently exists between county constabularies, the grouped police authorities and the role of central Government. Perhaps I had better say no more about that relationship at this stage, because it is delicate and, as my hon. Friend said, passions run high.

I should like to deal with special education needs. Local education authorities radically revised their management of special education to match the requirements of the 1981 Act. The study will be concerned with the identification of best practice as it has emerged. One particular focus will be the problems of LEA-wide financial management, given that resource demands emerge on a pupil-by-pupil basis.

My hon. Friend asked why the Bill was concerned only with immediate reports. The choice between making an immediate report and making a report at the conclusion of the audit is a decision for the auditor. Any report can be made an immediate report, but the auditor may decide that the objective of improving value for money—or whatever purpose the report is intended to achieve—is better accomplished by making his report later. However, immediate reports will be the general rule.

It may be helpful to my hon. Friends and other hon. Members if I explain just why it is that, when an auditor makes a report, it is not there and then made available for comment at large. The reason lies in section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982, which prohibits either the appointed auditor or the commission from disclosing information relating to a particular body or person and obtained pursuant to the Act except with the consent of the body or person; for the purposes of the auditor's or commission's functions; or for the purposes of criminal proceedings.

Contravention is punishable by a fine and/or up to two years' imprisonment. That is a severe sanction, and naturally it is taken very seriously. The prohibition applies to all aspects of an auditor's work, including reports, whether they be immediate public interest reports or reports made at the conclusion of audit.

Given the severity of the sanctions my hon. Friends and other hon. Members may perhaps be puzzled as to how reports ever become public knowledge if the body or person concerned does not consent to disclosure of information. The answer lies in section 18(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. When a body meets formally to consider an auditor's report, the agenda supplied to the members of the meeting must be accompanied by the report and—this is the crucial provision—the report must not be excluded from the matter supplied for the benefit of any newspaper or from the documents open to inspection by the public.

It is of course at this point that we see the significance of the Bill. It parallels a similar provision that already applies in Scotland. The provisions that apply in Scotland were enacted under section 185 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In Scotland, under section 102 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Controller of Audit makes reports to the Commission for Local Authority Accounts on matters arising out of or in connection with the accounts of a local authority, so that such matters may be considered by the local authority concerned or brought to the attention of the public. The 1973 Act states that a copy of the report shall be sent to the local authority named in the report.

Under the amendments made by the 1989 Act, the Controller of Audit may now also send a copy of the report to any other person he thinks fit. In addition, the local authority concerned is required to send a copy of the report to each member of the authority and make additional copies available for public inspection. The Bill mirrors those provisions and introduces similar arrangements in England and Wales.

The Bill would ensure that an auditor's intention that a report should be brought immediately to the attention of the public could not be thwarted by procedural devices of the body subject to the report. Let me say at once that the great majority of bodies have behaved perfectly properly. However, on some occasions reports have been delayed when, in the public interest, they should have been seen immediately. The Bill seeks to prevent such delays.

The Bill has four principal features, all of which take effect as soon as an immediate report is received by the body. First, it entitles the public to see an auditor's immediate public interest report, to copy it and be supplied with a copy at reasonable cost. Secondly, it requires the body concerned to advertise the report. Thirdly, it provides for sanctions comparable to those of the current provisions of the 1982 Act. Fourthly, it gives the auditor fallback powers to ensure that the report is made known.

The Government are committed to making local government more accountable. This Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire is a helpful measure towards that desirable end, and it has the Government's strong support.

10.46 am

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on his good fortune in coming relatively high in the ballot, although he did not come high enough to be able to choose a controversial Bill. I also congratulate him on his success in choosing such a sensible Bill and thank him for the clarity with which he explained its provisions and set out its terms and purposes.

I regret that during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) which I was enjoying so much, I had to nip out of the Chamber to collect some further briefing material which had not arrived by the time the House sat this morning. Therefore, I was unable to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ask the detailed questions that I had hoped to ask the Minister. He may be able to answer them during my speech, so I shall be generous in giving way to him if he feels able, at any stage, to answer them. I confess that some of the points that I wish to raise are rather detailed and technical, so I should be happy for my hon. Friend to write to me rather than to answer them off the cuff, if he thought that that was preferable.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for answering one of the important questions that I had wanted to raise—the position of Scotland. Scotland has always been an anomaly compared with England and Wales. Often Bills —including this Bill—do not apply to Scotland, but only to England and Wales. Indeed, the final sentence of the Bill states:

"This Act extends to England and Wales only."

One always wonders why on earth that should be the case. What is it about the Scots that makes their legislative powers so different?

In trying to answer that question for myself, I turned to the Government's response to the report of the Widdicombe committee of inquiry. Paragraph 6.17 of the response states:

"The proposed legislative changes referred to in paragraph 6.6"

they detail what is set out in the Bill—

"would apply equally to reports of the Controller of Audit."

So I examined the Bill and discovered that they did not seem to apply and I wondered why not. My hon. Friend answered my query by saying that not only has Scotland been dealt with but that it has been dealt with earlier than England. I wonder why Scotland appears to be dealt with more expeditiously than England and Wales. I have no doubt that the provisions of the Bill would have been appreciated if they had been introduced earlier in England and Wales as they have no doubt been valuable in Scotland.

I have been trying to find out what the Bill is all about. I read the commendably brief report of the Committee that considered the Bill—the sitting of which lasted for no more than two minutes. That report was not as illuminating as one would normally expect, so I am little wiser or better informed about the details of the Bill.

What was the motive behind the Bill? Did it arise because of the debt swaps for which many local councils went in and which, eventually, the House of Lords decided to be ultra vires? If the Bill was in some way prompted by those debt swaps, I certainly believe that the auditors should have been involved, or should get involved in such transactions.

One of the powers available to the auditors is the ability to apply to the courts if they consider that a local authority is doing something that it has no right to do. Can the auditors therefore apply to the courts if a council is not doing something that it has a moral, if not legal, duty to do? My hon. Friend the Minister has already dwelt at some length on the failure of local authorities to collect rents, rates or the community charge—I should be grateful if he could give me further evidence of that. In fact there are many examples of such failure and one of the most glaring is what is happening in Lambeth now. The structure of local authorities seems to be relatively secure throughout most of the country, but in Lambeth services are breaking down, perhaps because the authority simply does not have the money, or perhaps because it is not collecting rents and the community charge. I should be grateful to hear what the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) has to say about that because I know that it concerns her greatly and that, in the past, she has spoken out courageously about it.

Ms. Ruddock: I am not sure whether it is in order for me to be drawn into this, but I am sure that you will keep me right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that the greatest disservice to local government, the collection of taxes and the provision of services has been the Government's poll tax legislation and they have just learnt the lesson of that.

Mr. Arbuthnot: If the hon. Lady was correct her argument would apply to every council in the country, but other councils manage to provide a reasonable level of service and to collect the vast majority of their rents, rates and community charge.

The hon. Lady is correct that we are changing the community charge. I was absolutely delighted at yesterday's statement because I was never enthusiastic about the community charge, to the extent that I did not vote for it. I am therefore naturally delighted that we are to change the community charge, but that does not excuse or explain the total chaos into which the borough of Lambeth has fallen. As a matter of urgency an investigation into the extent of the outstanding arrears in rents and community charge in the borough of Lambeth should be carried out. In the borough of Lambeth, perhaps alone of all councils, local government is breaking down. That is not as a result of the community charge, but because the Labour party has been in control of that borough for too long.

Auditors can apply to a court if they consider that a local authority is doing something that it has no legal right to do, but can they also apply to the court if they consider that a local authority is not doing something that it has a legal duty to do—to collect rents and the community charge on behalf of the other electors and community charge payers of that authority? I should be happy to give way to my hon. Friend the Minister at any time should he wish to put me right or help me with further information.

About a month ago I sponsored the Public Safety Information Bill, which placed a requirement on certain local authorities and bodies to publicise reports of interest to the public. Those reports related to safety. If a safety defect was discovered at a football stadium there would have been an obligation to post a notice at the entrances to warn spectators that there was a danger of combustible rubbish somewhere in that stadium. Is there a difference in philosophy between the publicity applied to public interest reports for local authorities and the publicity to be given to public safety that would have applied under the Public Safety Information Bill? I regret to say that that Bill's Second Reading took place on the day that the country was brought to a complete halt by the falling of white fluffy stuff from the sky. Unfortunately there was an insufficient number of Members in the House to enable the Bill to receive its Second Reading. That Bill, however, raised issues of relevance to today's Bill.

What concerns me most about the details of the Bill is whether the sanctions to be imposed are enforceable. Clause 1(4) states:

> "Any person who fails to comply with any requirement of subsection (2) above shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine".

Subsection (2) states

> "When such a report is so received by a body . . . the body shall in addition forthwith supply a copy of the report to every member of the body"

Subsection (4) deals with

> "any person who fails to comply with"

the requirements of subsection (2), but under subsection (2) there is no duty put on any person. The duty is put on a body, leaving aside the chairman of a parish meeting —for the purposes of this argument he is less important.

Subsection (2) puts a duty on a body to publicise a report, but subsection (4) provides that sanctions should be imposed on

> "any person who fails to comply with any requirement of subsection (2)".

If a body, perhaps a local authority, has the duty to publicise a report that is a matter of immediate public interest, surely the members of the body have the duty to comply with that publicity requirement. It therefore seems rather curious that, under the Bill, the members of a body might be liable if they have not been given information about that very report.

Mr. Mates: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend. Clause 1(2) requires the "body or chairman"—the person to whom the ultimate sanction applies—to provide the publicity.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful for that helpful information, but I am not entirely sure that it covers my argument. I suspect that the "body or chairman" refers to the public body—perhaps the district or county council —or the chairman of a parish meeting. If the "chairman" refers to the chairman of a parish meeting, I suspect that the chairman is not considered relevant for the purposes of a local authority.

Mr. Key: I hesitate to intervene in this interesting debate, but I believe that I can help. The word "person", as a legal term, includes a body.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. Although the word "person" includes a body, the word "body", curiously enough, does not include a person. Therefore, the body may still, ultimately, be liable for failing to provide the members of the body with the reports to which the publicity is meant to apply.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): My hon. Friend makes some good points about bodies. To some extent, those reports will be looking for heads. What is my hon. Friend's view on the publication of notices that may criticise the very people who are supposed to publish them?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I shall cover that question in a few moments. Similarly, one could ask what would happen if a report were published by a chief executive of a council who, instead of arranging for publication himself, said that he told Mrs. Snooks, the chief clerk, to publish it, but that she did not seem to have done so. If Mrs. Snooks then says that she was not told to do so, the securing of a conviction under clause 1(4) would be difficult to achieve. It would be difficult to decide, under that clause, precisely who should be convicted and on which person in the local authority the duty to secure the publicity should be laid.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) raised an important issue about reports criticising the people who might be under a duty to disclose them. My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire said that one purpose of the Bill is not to put a duty on a chief finance officer to publish a report because he might be the subject of a critical report. That may be so, but the council may also be the subject of a critical report and would be rather reluctant to publicise it. That is why the Bill places a duty on councils to publicise reports.

Is the council the right "person" on whom to place that duty? Would not it be more correct to put the duty on the auditor? If the council has an overall duty to publicise a report of public interest, it will be in a difficult position, because it may have to publicise a report that criticises it. That may affect the publicity that it gives to the immediate report. The advertisement that the council must place in local newspapers may never be read because it will be couched, intentionally, in such obscure terms. Everyone knows that criteria exist for making some advertisements more eye-catching than others. For example, one reads more assiduously an advertisement with much white space than a block of close-printed verbiage. Therefore, the council will ensure that advertisements for reports will be as obscure, unreadable and unattractive as possible. A school of people will try to make advertisements as attractive and noticeable and possible while, as a result of the Bill, another school will try to make them as unattractive and unproductive as possible. We have all seen planning notices at the back of newspapers which do not stand out at all. We may see them, but we do not read them. They exist simply to be avoided.

We could avert such a problem if the Bill did not place the duty of publicity on the council, which may be the subject of a critical report, any more than it does on the chief finance officer. The Bill has clearly moved away from that, but further progress in that direction is still to be made. There may be an opportunity in another place to make such progress.

Mr. Knapman: My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Clause 1(2) refers to one or more local newspapers. In my district council area, I could name seven or eight local newspapers. Although, together, they cover the whole district, no single newspaper does so. Has my hon. Friend any thoughts on that?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend raises a helpful issue which leads me to the corollary of what he says: some local newspapers have low circulations. Local councillors who are criticised in an immediate report by an auditor will choose to advertise in a newspaper with the lowest circulation possible, covering the smallest area. Necessarily, those newspapers will have the lowest cost of advertising because they will want to attract more advertising to boost sales. Local councils face stringent financial limits and will naturally choose the cheapest rates if they can get away with doing so.

Although the important publicity that is to be given to those immediate reports is a valuable move, I wonder whether the duty to provide such publicity is placed on the right person. In an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, I said that the Bill does not include health service bodies. I referred to the sensible work carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) in trying to ensure that there was outside scrutiny of health service bodies. It is a pity, in some respects, that the publicity provided by the Bill should not apply to local authorities. After all, the publicity relates to matters of immediate public interest. Local authorities are concerned about such matters, as are the public. The public write to me far more frequently about my local health authorities than about my local authority, because health is a matter which affects us all. I wonder whether the publicity available under the Bill should also be available to immediate reports of a public interest relating to a health authority.

The Bill rightly gives the opportunity for increased publicity for immediate reports by the auditors of local authorities, but it does not appear to give the opportunity for similar publicity for reports praising local authorities. Local councillors are the subject of a constant barrage of criticism, sometimes from central Government and sometimes from the electors. When they hear the words "local government", most people feel that it is a subject in which they should not be interested and that it is a subject on which their eyes should glaze over—and they usually do.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said yesterday that it is increasingly difficult to find people of the proper quality to play the role of local councillors. I detect a slight change in the atmosphere in that respect, which I welcome. Local councillors and local authorities do an essential job and they should be encouraged in the same way as teachers, who do an essential job, should be encouraged. From time to time, councillors should be the subject of praise as well as of criticism. My concern about the atmosphere that used to exist—and which may no longer exist—is that auditors' reports are more likely to be immediate reports if they are critical of local authorities than if they praise local authorities for a job well done.

A report praising, for example, the city of Westminster for its efficient and effective litter collection service could be the subject of an immediate auditors' report if my proposals were taken into account. A report praising the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea for its most effective and early privatisation of the refuse collection service in Kensington could be the subject of publicity, insisted on by the auditors.

Local authority employment and local authority service are becoming increasingly difficult. It is interesting that, as a result of the Bill, it is probably only in local authority employment that a person who slips up on the job would face not simply a reprimand from the employer, but a criminal record. It is not surprising that recruitment to local authorities is lower than would be helpful. As a Member of Parliament, if I do not deal with my letters quickly, I may get rude letters of complaint from my constituents. I may even get rude letters of complaint in the local newspapers, which would receive far more publicity than the advertisements suggested in the Bill. I might even be thrown out by my electorate, but I would be most unlikely to face, as I understand the current legislation, a criminal record.

As a result of the Bill, if local authority employees failed to deal with their post quickly and if they failed to post or to distribute reports to the councillors who should receive them, they would face not only a reprimand, rude letters or a possible sacking, but a knock on the door and the possibility of a criminal record. That may discourage some people from going into local government service and it may be one reason why there has been some difficulty in providing effective and efficient local government service in recent years.

Despite my perhaps over-detailed and over-zealous questions on the Bill, I welcome it. I welcome the publicity that will be given to matters of great and immediate public interest and I wish the Bill well in the House and in the other place.

11.14 am

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me, because you know how keen the competition has been this week to speak in debates on local government. I am tempted in the matter by a one-clause Bill, which I am more likely to understand. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on introducing it so well. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on his point that scrutiny and accountability are important in these matters. I second one among the many good points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), who asked whether the auditors can apply to the courts. That is critical in this matter, as I shall explain later.

The central point must be the role of the auditor. In carrying out the audit, he must satisfy himself of the propriety and regularity of the accounts, and that the body concerned has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. I am sure, because I believe that I am repeating the views of my hon. Friend the Minister, that Ministers have always respected the independence of auditors in carrying out their duties. To do otherwise could be construed as political interference, and I am sure that there is no wish for that.

What is the point of making recommendations if there is no follow-up? I propose to detail the experience in my area of an auditor's report and what has happened since it was published. I have here a detailed pamphlet entitled "District Auditor's Report". I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford will agree that that is its title. It goes into considerable detail about a local council. On the ninth page of tightly packed print, we come to point 38, entitled "Previous Audit Reports". The pamphlet says:

"I am concerned about the time it takes for the Council to implement recommendations agreed with my staff."

There is little point in having such a detailed report if nothing comes of it, which is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford has made.

The pamphlet makes further serious points. It refers to "a lack of co-ordination between departments, which was leading to a loss of rent income . . . the fragmentation of ownership and the lack of objectives".

That is a reasonable generality. The pamphlet also refers to

"a lack of accurate information."

I am heartened to think that it is not merely Government Back Benchers who suffer from those points. The points are made in an auditor's report, which reveals a serious state of affairs.

I was under the impression that the report was a district auditor's report. I read it with care at the time, and I understood it to be a report. It was because there was no action on the report that I decided to write to the Audit Commission a little later to ask what would become of the report. The commission replied:

"Dear Mr. Knapman . . . In fact there has been no Audit Commission report"—

on the council.

"The District Auditor of the Council issued a public interest report in May of this year but that was part of fulfilment of his audit responsibilities and not a central directed Audit Commission study. Lest you think that this is a distinction without a difference, I should explain that the Commission has two functions, first to undertake studies into economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government and, second, to appoint auditors to all local authorities. We link these two duties together closely and local work usually follows central research. But the individual auditor of an authority is responsible for all reports issued on a particular council and those reports may cover Audit Commission work or, as in this case, other issues particular to that authority."

So the individual auditor is responsible for all the reports. What had happened to the individual auditor in this case? He had retired immediately after the preparation of the report. Immense expense had been gone to and some devastating remarks had been made in the report. I have read three such remarks from 10 or so tightly packed pages —the allegations of a lack of accurate information, fragmentation of ownership and a lack of co-ordination between departments. Those are wide-ranging criticisms. But apparently it is up to the local auditor whether anything comes of the report and in this case he had retired.

At that stage, several of my constituents, who were not exactly thrilled by the level of community charge in my constituency, started writing to me. I shall read two or three extracts. One constituent wrote:

"The public interest report would have had more impact if it had covered the events of the past in more detail and if the public meeting had been more sensitive to the views of the public . . . the District Auditor's representative has told me that the Council is not a poor performer compared with other local Councils"—

given the contents of the report, I finding that surprising—

"it is not difficult to imagine the contents of the next report."

The criticisms in the report are devastating, and if such performance is thought to be average, I dread to think how reports on other councils read. No wonder that my constituent summarised the position thus:

"Our complaint and concern will have been swept under the carpet to remain part of history. Such is my confidence in the Audit Commission."

Having received a large number of letters on the subject, I took an interest and wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, enclosing two or three of my constituents' letters as examples, which I said were self-explanatory:

"the activities of the direct labour organisation and the scale of the financial losses that they have incurred"—

just one subject of the report—

"are matters which have been considered by the District Auditor. I believe that the District Auditor can act as an Ombudsman"—

I am now not sure that that is so—

"I think it is now time for him to detail what action he is going to take following the publication of the various Reports mentioned in the letter."

I had a useful reply from my hon. Friend.

The House can no doubt imagine that I have been under considerable pressure from a large number of my constituents who had high hopes that an auditor's report would provide something useful—perhaps an indication of what the council had achieved by way of improvements following earlier reports. My hon. Friend the Minister wrote to me:

"Although the District Auditor will be concerned about the losses incurred by the Council's DLO and will, no doubt consider whether it would be appropriate to take action under the powers available to him, the Secretary of State has his own . . . powers to invoke sanctions where a DLO fails to achieve the rate of return prescribed by legislation. The ultimate sanction is to order the closure of the direct labour organisation."

Can my hon. Friend the Minister say how often the Secretary of State has exercised such powers and under what circumstances? I suspect that the answer is no, in which case the Bill is doubly welcome.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities continued:

"My Department was already aware that the DLO expected to incur a loss"—

I am surprised about that—

"but from the information in the letter, this loss now seems likely to be far worse than anticipated".

It was. The auditor's report suggested that it would be a £800,000 loss but, within a fortnight of the publication of the report, we knew that the loss was £1·6 million, which took some doing considering that there were only 150 people working for the direct labour organisation. It might have been cheaper to send them on a permanent holiday in the Seychelles—but I shall let that pass.

My hon. Friend's letter said that, when the new report arrived, the Department would

"look at it closely before deciding whether it would be appropriate to initiate formal action with a view to . . . imposing sanctions as referred to above. In the meantime, I have asked the officials to seek the Council's confirmation of the deficit likely to be reported and that the accounts will be submitted within the statutory timescale."

The statutory time scale is something of a mystery to me, because this matter has now been going on for some years. Auditors' reports have regularly been produced and we have then been told that the report to which I have referred is not a district auditor's report even though it is headed as such. I am not sure what the statutory time scale is, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could say whether he expects any improvement to be made under the Bill and if he could provide some detail.

That was not the end of the saga. Finally, I received a further letter from the Audit Commission. I must say that by then the activities of the Audit Commission and its assurances that its principal interest was that its reports should be of benefit to the public at large, were wearing a little thin.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Knapman: I suspect that they were wearing thin with my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford too.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Not at all. I am merely concerned that my hon. Friend started his penultimate sentence with the word "finally". I am following his remarks with interest, as are other hon. Members. Has my hon. Friend noticed the sad—indeed, appalling—absence of the Liberal Democrats throughout our debate? Perhaps that shows the extent of their interest in local government matters.

Mr. Knapman: It is no wonder that the Liberal Democrats are called the "salads". The green Benches are there but there is nobody to sit on them. I certainly hope that Opposition Members—particularly the official Opposition——

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Knapman: I will give way in a moment.

Mr. Davies: On this point.

Mr. Knapman: I shall not be leaving the point for a moment. I had hoped that Opposition Members would contribute to the debate, because so many of the councils concerned are Labour controlled. It is crucial that the Bill goes through because of what has happened in Lambeth, Liverpool and Derbyshire, where charges of £500 or £600 or more have been suggested. One might have thought that the Opposition Benches would be packed with Members wanting to speak in this important debate. But perhaps we shall learn a little more, as I imagine the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is about to explain where his 260 hon. Friends are.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to place on record the fact that only he and the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) are present on the Conservative Back Benches. I hope that *Hansard* will record the fact that the debate has been attended by only two Conservative Members on a voluntary basis—excluding, of course, the conscripts on the Government Front Bench, who are here to do their duty. Far be it from me to apologise for the absence of the Liberal Democrats, although, having listened for the best part of half an hour to probably the most boring and tedious speech that I have ever had the misfortune to hear, I suggest that the absent Liberal Democrats probably have the better side of the bargain.

Mr. Knapman: I do not claim to be a great orator, but for the hon. Gentleman to say that he has never heard a worse speech is a severe indictment of his attendance record.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Has my hon. Friend noticed that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is apparently unable to see, because there are another three of our hon. Friends on the Back Benches? The hon. Gentleman is also unable to count because my hon. Friend has been speaking for only 12 interesting minutes.

Mr. Ron Davies *rose*——

Mr. Knapman: The hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene again. If what I have said is to be further dissected, I look forward with interest to my own speech.

Mr. Davies: It is better to become involved in the debate than just to sit and listen to it. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) has just entered the Chamber, therefore creating a temporary record of three Conservative Back Benchers. If I got the time of the hon. Gentleman's speech wrong and he has been speaking for only 12 minutes that is a further indictment because, he seems to have been speaking for half an hour. If my attendance record has been less than perfect and this is not the worst speech that I have heard, the experience has certainly not encouraged me to spend more time in the Chamber than I have to.

Mr. Knapman: If that is a promise, it tempts me to carry on much longer, because I have a great deal of information to give the House.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) rightly said that I had just entered the Chamber. I do not know whether he was here earlier when we listened with great interest to the speeches by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and by the sponsor of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates).

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

I am not here entirely by choice but because of the even more important Bill which follows this one, which I have the honour to sponsor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I hope that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) will not be further diverted.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you think that I may be diverted even though the hon. Member for Caerphilly does not.

Some of my hon. Friends who have been here for long periods during the morning have understandably had to return to their constituencies. The hon. Member for Caerphilly must accept that this debate merely continues the trend of the local government debates that we had earlier in the week, when Opposition Members were keen to talk about the Government's attitude to local government but told us nothing about the record or the proposals of the Labour party.

I said earlier that I had received a letter from the Audit Commission following my complaint that nobody seemed to know what effect the commission's report was having in my constituency. The commission's reply stated:

"The District Auditor wrote to both constituents . . . explaining that he intended to issue a further public report in the new year following completion of the 1989-90 audit. The report will record the Council's progress or otherwise on each of the issues raised in his May report.

The District Auditor considers that to issue yet another report now would be premature and would only add to community charge payers' costs to no good purpose. Having publicised major shortcomings in the Council's management processes he feels he has to give members and officers a reasonable time to address those problems before commenting again.

In circumstances where an auditor is critical of management processes, his only remedy is publicity"

—until now—

"The level of publicity attracted by the District Auditor's report and actions there has far exceeded the norm for this type of local authority."

I agree that the local council obtained a great deal of publicity. I am concerned to know what action the district auditor can take to see that his recommendations—in this case basic recommendations—are carried out. Is the threat of publicity sufficient?

The hon. Member for Caerphilly is obviously interested in local government matters and is probably still proud of the record of Liverpool council. That in itself will attract publicity in the next few months. Another example is Lambeth.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend will also be interested in the activities of Derbyshire county council, a loony left authority if ever there was one. He will note that the two Ministers in the House are from Derbyshire constituencies and that they are listening with interest to his speech.

Mr. Knapman: If I had the wisdom and the knowledge to speak on behalf of my two ministerial colleagues, I would have a tale to tell. I understand that Derbyshire has as bad a record as any council in the country. It is saying something to put that council in the same loony league as Lambeth and Liverpool. The community charge there is £500 to £600 and it bears a heavy responsibility for imposing on both rich and poor people bills which many of them have a job to pay.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman has invited me to join in the debate. I should warn him that, for 15 years before I became a Member of Parliament, I was a member of a local authority. For the last three of those years, I was the chairman of the finance committee of that authority, and for each of those three years it was the only local authority in Wales that had a clear report from the district auditor. I am happy to discuss that record with the hon. Gentleman if he wants to go down that road.

Mr. Knapman: The hon. Gentleman's intervention shows what can and should be done. Many of his colleagues in Derbyshire, Lambeth and Liverpool say that they are forced by cuts and so on to reduce services. I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has placed on record the fact that he was a finance officer, and his view that a satisfactory level of services could be achieved if other Opposition Members were as bright as he.

Mr. Davies: I remind the hon. Gentleman that my local authority is Welsh. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would ponder that and offer an explanation of why the only Conservative-controlled authority in Wales, the Vale of Glamorgan authority, has the highest rate of increase in Wales in its forecast for this year's poll tax.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Stroud may find it somewhat difficult to respond directly to that intervention and to remain in order.

Mr. Knapman: You have saved me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from travelling down a cul-de-sac that I should not take. I could provide all the information that the hon. Gentleman seeks, because I have an encyclopaedic knowledge of Welsh local government. However, it would be impossible to do that and to stay in order.

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is a curious fact that Welsh local authorities seem to have a good record. Many of them are Labour controlled and have better records than most of their English counterparts. Perhaps my hon. Friend could use his encyclopaedic knowledge to expand on that.

Mr. Knapman *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but he is being tempted from the straight and narrow. When there were no interventions, he remained in order.

Mr. Knapman: I wonder whether a lower level of charges in Wales means that there is less likelihood of Welsh councils being affected by the Bill. The average community charge bill in Wales is considerably lower than in England.

I was recently invited to speak to some people in Monmouth, which some people say is part of Wales. The agent told me to speak on any subject except the community charge, because the charge is not an issue in Wales. That shows that the principle of most people paying something towards the cost of local government is sound, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said yesterday. However, the level of the charge is where the problem arises, but it is not a problem in Wales even in areas where there are Labour authorities. Labour authorities in England spend too much and obtain the nickname "loony" authorities. We shall continue to address them in that way.

I am pleased to know that, when the hon. Member for Caerphilly was a finance officer, he was well able to manage within the rules and restrictions which apply to local government and that he has not found the Government's record lacking during the past decade.

I was asking my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford whether the threat of publicity was sufficient and whether it would make any difference to Labour councillors such as those who inhabit and infest councils in Lambeth, Liverpool and Derbyshire. Those councillors have very thick skins. I know of one council in my constituency that sits until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning discussing the import of South African oranges or whether to name a local park Nelson Mandela park. I often wonder about the cost per hour of running a council and paying all the officers until 1 o'clock in the morning: money is going out of the window at the same time as the hot air.

What is the point of having district auditors reports if the Audit Commission says that they are not auditors' reports and no action is taken even when the report is damning? I look forward to the Minister's reply to these points.

11.41 am

Mr. Key: With the leave of the House. I am grateful for the opportunity to answer some of the important points raised by my hon. Friends. I shall endeavour to be as brief as possible, because we have been here a long time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) asked why Scotland appears to be many years ahead of us. As someone whose first job was a teacher in Scotland and who is still a Scottish registered teacher, I can say that Scotland is ahead of England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, on many matters—for example on education and the community charge.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) almost suggested, the Bill arises from the Widdicombe report. He instructed us on what the Widdicombe report said on this issue, so I shall not burden the House by repeating it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford asked whether the auditors could report on the collection of rents. The auditors can report on an authority's failure to collect the income due to it. In the past six years, the auditors have issued more than 30 reports on that subject. There would be no question of the auditor applying to the courts on such a matter to seek a declaration of unlawfulness. Such applications to the court are made only when there is clear illegality and a breach of the statutory duties given to councils, and that would not apply in the case of increasing arrears. Auditors can and do criticise the poor value for money given by authorities, but the action would not be ultra vires.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the Minister expect the heavy expenditure that will be wasted this week and next week because poll tax bills will have to be ripped up and thrown away to be ultra vires? If local authorities next week have to throw substantial sums of money down the drain because poll tax bills have already been printed and bundled up but will have to be thrown away, would that be a proper subject for a district auditor's report?

Will the hon. Gentleman also undertake to look closely at the situation in Westminster council, which faces the prospect of incurring expenditure of £42 on each poll tax bill, for a return of £36? Is that an example of good local authority practice or an example of a situation that should be examined by the district auditor?

Mr. Key: Westminster council has alleged that it will cost more than £40 to collect the community charge. I find that difficult to understand, given that the average figure for the whole country is £15 per bill. I look forward to hearing in more detail what Westminster council has to say.

I do not consider that the proposals in the Bill that I introduced yesterday require an auditor's report. The changes that it introduces are not the responsibility of, or the result of neglect by, the local authorities. The matter will be decided by the House after due consideration. The House is the proper forum for making such decisions, at the Government's suggestion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford asked whether auditors could intervene if councils failed in their responsibility to do something, as opposed to intervening when councils do not do something. The answer is yes. For example, in 1985 the councils of Liverpool and Lambeth failed to set a rate for the following financial year. The district auditors for those two authorities intervened, with the result that 42 councillors in Liverpool and 32 councillors in Lambeth were surcharged by the auditor and disqualified from public office for five years.

The Bill places on the authority the duty to report, because it is the authority's conduct that is the subject of criticism by the auditor. It is the council's duty to manage the authority; that is why the members were elected democratically by local people. It is not for the auditor to usurp the role of elected members. However, auditors have a fallback power, and can make reports available should they so wish.

My hon. Friend was concerned that an auditor may wish his report to be published but certain councillors may not. Clause 2(5) says:

> "An auditor who has sent an immediate report to a body or to the chairman of a parish meeting under section 18(3) above—
>
> (a) may notify any person he thinks fit of the fact that he has made such a report, and
>
> (b) may supply a copy of the report, or of any part of it, to any person he thinks fit."

That may answer my hon. Friend's question. The Bill provides that the auditor's report must be sent to all councillors of all political parties. Given the different political complexions of our councils, I would expect that that would ensure the publication of any such report.

My hon. Friend suggested that there was no opportunity for reports to praise local authorities. I am glad to say that this is not so. The Audit Commission publishes a range of reports which are always careful to name authorities that have performed particularly well. I happen to have with me an Audit Commission report called "The Road to Wigan Pier", on the planning of local authority museums and art galleries. Paragraph 18 states:

> "The Wigan Pier Heritage Centre, the funding for which was provided by a variety of public and private sources, including the European Community social fund, central Government and the English Tourist Board, is a major tourist attraction, with half a million visitors in its first year of operation; its success has attracted investment to the area and contributed to Wigan's economic regeneration."

So the Audit Commission certainly has a role in praising local authorities.

[Mr. Key]

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) was worried about a failure to act on a report. I shall write to him in more detail about the case he mentioned. The Audit Commission's letter was, as he would expect, perfectly correct in its reply about the role of the auditor. The retirement of the auditor did not remove the obligation of the council to act on his recommendations; inevitably, auditors have to retire or take over from each other from time to time. In such cases, the outgoing auditor ensures that the incoming one is fully briefed on the salient points of the audit. Those points will then be properly considered and acted upon in the course of future audit work. I shall in any case undertake to write to my hon. Friend about the worries that he has raised on behalf of his constituents.

I should like to end on a more positive note. Although the Audit Commission's duty is to ensure good value for money for local and national taxpayers and the highest quality of services that we would all expect of local authorities, it would not be right to end this important debate on a sour note. One of the major objectives of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in conducting his review was to encourage best practice in local government. We have been highly conscious over the past few years that in the eyes of many people the status and standing of local government have declined.

As hon. Members on both sides will recognise, it has become more and more difficult to persuade good people to stand for local councils. If we believe in a proper constitutional arrangement between central and local government, which must depend on the quality of local government, it is important that the House ensures that the functions, structure and finance of local government be put right, in the interests of the nation. That is the objective of the Government's new policy, and the importance of the Audit Commission in this should not be underestimated. I reiterate that it has a positive as well as a negative role; it should criticise when necessary, and praise when that is proper. That should also be the role of the House and of this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motor Vehicles (Safety Equipment for Children) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

11.51 am

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am delighted that this important Bill, which I have the honour to promote, has got so far through its proceedings as to have reached Third Reading by the middle of March. I hope that the House will agree to Third Reading today so that the Bill will proceed to another place, where I hope that it will have as easy a passage.

I am grateful to all who have supported the Bill, sponsors and others alike, and to those who were kind enough to attend the Committee stage and to give me their wholehearted support throughout proceedings on the Bill. I am delighted to see one of the Bill's sponsors here this morning—the Opposition Chief Whip——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Deputy Chief Whip.

Mr. Jopling: Ah. My mind had jumped ahead to what will inevitably happen in the fullness of time. The hon. Gentleman has all the talent and judgment to ensure that one day he follows in the distinguished footsteps of another north-east Member who currently holds the post. In any event, I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support; I know that it is difficult for Members in the Whips' Office to associate themselves with a particular Bill, so I am doubly grateful for his support.

I came 16th in the ballot for private Members' Bills. That meant that I had to think quite hard about what kind of Bill I proposed to introduce. When one comes 16th, one cannot hope to have the first slot on one of the Fridays set aside for private Members' Bills. Inevitably one will have the third slot. Therefore, there is little opportunity of a long debate on the Bill, particularly if one chooses a contentious issue. I concluded that it would be far better to try to present a Bill that was modest but helpful, was above all uncontentious and was one which the House could readily accept for the general good.

Only once before have I been in the position of moving the Third Reading of a private Members' Bill. In the late 1960s, when you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I were mere boys in the House, I came 18th in the ballot. I decided then that I would raise a non-contentious issue that would help the general public. Therefore, I decided to help parish councils, of which there are dozens in my constituency. I have always hesitated to give the title of that Bill—the Parish Councils and Burial Authorities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. It became an Act and it did useful and helpful things for parish councils. I devised that Bill with the help of the parish councils association.

Having come 16th this Session, I thought that I could do nothing more helpful than preserve and encourage the use and sale of efficient safety equipment for children in motor cars. Many people believe that it is completely safe for children to travel on the back seat of a car or on an adult's lap. However, unrestrained children can be thrown through the windscreen or on to the dashboard in an accident even at speeds as low as 25 mph. The staggering statistics are that 60 children are killed and more than 900 are seriously injured in such accidents each year.

Restraints have reduced the risk of injury by two thirds. It is obviously a worthwhile aim to strengthen the measures that have already been taken to ensure that fewer children are killed and injured in car accidents.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that some parents hold their children on their laps when sitting in the rear seats in cars, not simply because they may not have a child car seat suitable for that child, but because they might find it inconvenient to fit such a car seat which they may already possess, but which is somewhere else? Does he agree that the practice adopted by Volvo of building a child car seat into the car should be adopted more widely by other car manufacturers?

Mr. Jopling: I did not know that Volvo fitted such seats, but we often find that the Swedes are innovators in these areas. My hon. Friend has described a most worthwhile development and I hope that his comments will be noted by other motor manufacturers.

A little earlier I referred to the easy progress that the Bill has received through Parliament. That shows that it is not a party-political matter and no one has attempted, quite rightly, to use it in that way. The provisions that I propose are aimed at improving further the safety of child passengers in motor vehicles. Children are perhaps the most vulnerable of all car occupants. They are more easily thrown about and seriously injured when they have the misfortune to be involved in an accident.

In general, the Bill enables the Secretary of State for Transport to make regulations to control the sale and hire of safety equipment for children so that only equipment that conforms with British or international safety standards can be used to protect children in the event of an accident. Also, retailers will have to ensure that appropriate information about the installation and use of such equipment is provided with the equipment at the point of sale. That is important. We want to ensure that when a car owner purchases equipment he is told how properly to fit it into the car. There is no point in hazarding life or injury by such equipment being wrongly fitted. The equipment that would be designated by regulations under the Bill is intended directly or indirectly to restrain a child in the event of an accident.

The problem is that the present regulations control the sale only of child restraints that are considered to be vehicle parts. That deals with the problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) raised in relation to direct restraints that are directly attached to vehicles. One difficulty is that equipment such as booster cushions and carrycots which comply with the standards do not fall into that category. Although the use of such equipment could be regulated by statutory instruments, all ordinary cushions—that is, cushions that are not specifically made to avoid injury to children in accidents—and carrycots would be banned from vehicles. It would be unacceptable to ban ordinary cushions and carrycots. One could not justify such an action on safety grounds. That is why it is necessary to have this amending Bill. The Bill will make it possible to control the sale of all types of child safety equipment designed to protect children in motor vehicles.

After the Bill was considered in Committee the only argument was whether we had taken 50 or 20 seconds. The Chairman, an hon. Member from north Wales whose constituency I cannot immediately remember—it is a Welsh name that I cannot pronounce—managed to conclude our business so quickly that I was not able to explain in detail just what the Bill would do. It would be helpful if I mentioned some of the matters that I would have explained on that occasion.

Clause 1 provides that it should be a criminal offence for a person to sell or to offer for sale certain types of equipment that are conducive to child safety unless that equipment satisfies the requirements prescribed by the regulations. The clause introduces a new section 15A to the Road Traffic Act 1988, which will be similar to the existing provisions that control the sale of motor cycle helmets. Lest anyone should accuse me of not declaring my interests, I must point out that I currently have the honour of being the president of the Auto-Cycle Union, which is this country's governing body for all motor cycle sport. It is naturally concerned about safety and has established strong regulations covering helmets and other safety equipment for motor cycle sport.

The types of equipment that would be designated by the regulations provided for in clause 1 would be those which, in some way, directly or indirectly, are intended to restrain a child in the event of an accident. Such equipment would include the types of child seat belts or booster cushions that are restrained solely by adult seat belts, as well as those that have their own straps for attachment to the vehicle. I am sure that the House knows that it is possible to use adult safety straps for certain types of child safety equipment. In certain circumstances, that can be an effective way of restraining children, especially young children.

The regulations would allow the sale of all types of child safety equipment, but only if they are approved to the relevant British standard as well as to the United Nations ECE regulation 44, or to the equivalent European Community directive. I understand that the Commission in Brussels is currently working on such a directive and I very much hope that it will soon emerge and be adopted.

The Road Traffic Act 1988 does not contain any powers for controlling the sale of all child safety equipment, hence the need for my Bill. Section 41 of that Act enables the Secretary of State for Transport to make regulations generally covering the use of motor vehicles and trailers on roads, their construction, and the equipment and conditions under which they may be used. Section 42 makes it an offence for a person to use on a road a motor vehicle or trailer that does not comply with the regulations, or who causes or permits a vehicle to be so used. Section 76(3) makes it an offence for a person to supply a motor vehicle part that, if fitted to a vehicle that is in use on the roads, would lead to a breach of the construction and use requirements.

Those provisions are, therefore, of no assistance in controlling the sale of booster cushions and other types of child restraint that could not be described as "vehicle parts".

Under another statutory instrument, if the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 were amended to make it an offence to use a vehicle on a road if a child was sitting on any cushion other than one which complied with the British safety regulations, it would become illegal to use a car in which a child was sitting, for example, on a normal household cushion. I believe, and it is the view of the Government, that that would be

[Mr. Jopling]

unacceptable to the general public. I am advised by the Department that it could not be justified on safety grounds.

The present construction and use regulations require in section 47(8) that seat belts be marketed with a British standard mark or designated approved mark. The British standard mark is defined in paragraph 8 and includes, for example, a mark specified in BSAU 185 which is the appropriate British standard on booster cushions. That led both the trade and the Department to believe that all child restraint equipment, including booster cushions and carrycots, had to comply with the regulations. However, it became apparent to the Department's legal advisers that the provisions were defective for equipment that is not permanently attached to the vehicle and consequently cannot be described as part of the vehicle. That defect has not been corrected so far because it may, understandably, cause alarm in the trade which has spent a great deal of money on bringing its equipment up to the specification of British or European standards.

To correct the defect could also be seen by the public as a climbdown by Parliament on child safety. However, I am pleased to say that if the Bill receives its Third Reading today and passes on to the statute book, it will be possible to make regulations that will effectively remedy the position. That is the principal reason why the Bill has had such a universal welcome and why it is so appropriate.

The Bill will also ensure that consumers are provided with appropriate information at the point of sale about the suitability of equipment for specific weights of children and, in certain cases, the vehicle models for which the restraint is designed. Current standards require that full instructions on fitting and use be provided with the restraints and it is intended to reflect that in the regulations which the Government will undoubtedly readily bring to the House once the Bill is on the statute book. In that way, the regulations will make it an offence to provide inadequate or incorrect information at the point of sale. That will help to ensure that child restraints are correctly installed, so enhancing child safety.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): It is implicit in my right hon. Friend's important Bill that there are two distinct types of restraining equipment and cushions. Would it be an offence for people to use improper equipment as well as to sell improper equipment, which will be an offence under his Bill?

Mr. Jopling: I can sum that up best—my hon. Friend the Minister will endorse my understanding of the Bill, if he agrees—by saying that the Bill will not make it an offence, for example, to sit a child on a household cushion. A small child protected by a normal adult safety belt can easily slip underneath and have an unpleasant accident. If a child sits on a cushion, it increases the safety factor, even though the cushion may not be specially designated as suitable under the Bill. It is a classic case of not throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Mr. Arbuthnot: On several occasions during his remarks my right hon. Friend has said that this is a question of restricting the sale of equipment. Will he confirm for the benefit of those who happen to read his speech in *Hansard* that it will not be possible to evade the Bill's requirements by hiring equipment? Will he confirm that the Bill applies to hiring as well as to selling?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The explanatory memorandum to the Bill, which he will understand as well as I do, explains the Bill clearly in layman's language, and certainly I am a layman in these matters. The final sentence about clause 1 states:

"Provision is made for equipment let on hire and equipment offered for sale or hire."

Therefore, my hon. Friend's point is well and truly covered by the Bill.

Clause 2 allows for a person who is accused of an offence under the Bill to mount a defence on the basis that the infringement was due to the act or default of another person, where another person has given a written warranty. Consequently, it provides for another person to be accused of an offence. I gather that the provision already exists in the Road Traffic Act 1988 in respect of similar offences of selling equipment that is not of a prescribed type.

The House will understand that clause 1 provides for the Secretary of State to require that appropriate information is given with the prescribed equipment at the time of sale, particularly with regard to fitting that equipment. The Bill allows for the possibility that manufacturers or wholesalers may have supplied retailers with inappropriate or incorrect information. Therefore, it allows retailers to mount a defence if they can prove that they have been supplied with incorrect information, had a warranty to the effect that it was correct and had no reason to believe that it was incorrect. In certain cases they would also need to show that the equipment and the information with it had remained unchanged while in their possession. Clause 2 further provides that a person who gives a false warranty to the original accused may be accused of an offence. That explains the largest part of the Bill.

Clause 3 sets out the offence and the penalty provided by the Bill and any attendant regulations. The level of fine is in line with that for similar offences under the Road Traffic Act 1988 of selling equipment which is not of a prescribed type. We are amending the 1988 Act to provide for the new offences that are created by my Bill.

The level 3 fine on the standard scale is currently £400 and the Criminal Justice Bill contains provisions to update the level to £1,000.

Clause 4 contains the short title and states, as does the Road Traffic Act 1988, that the measure shall not apply to Northern Ireland. I hope that I shall not be asked why it should not apply to that part of the United Kingdom because I should have to admit that I did not have the faintest idea.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I was about to ask my right hon. Friend that very question. Perhaps the Minister will explain the reason when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Jopling: A mine of information, deeper and more extensive than I, will no doubt explain the reason in due course. I suppose that the logic is that if the voluminous 1988 Act that we are amending does not apply to Northern Ireland, my new amending piece of legislation should not apply to it.

I hope that I have given a clear explanation of the need for my Bill. It is with pride that I commend it to the House.

It is modest, but I hope that in agreeing to it, the House will, in the years to come, save a large number of children from unnecessary death and serious injury.

12.21 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I support the Bill and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on introducing a most important measure. It is amazing to think that we have not legislated before on the important issue with which the Bill deals. I missed the first few minutes of my right hon. Friend's speech, for which I apologise, so I am not sure whether he gave figures to show the true picture of the extent of death and injury caused to youngsters who were not properly restrained in cars.

I was fortunate to get on to the statute book last year a measure dealing with the provision of protective headgear for riders under the age of 14. My Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Act is similar in concept to my right hon. Friend's measure, in that it is designed to protect children from danger. The research I did on my measure revealed that a substantial number of accidents involved children riding. Something had to be done about that, and I am sure that similar considerations form the background to my right hon. Friend's Bill.

It is illegal for children under 18 to travel in the front seat of a vehicle.

Mr. Arbuthnot *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend, who is a lawyer, wish to correct me?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am not really in a position to correct my hon. Friend, because my sphere is more wills and tax than the criminal law. But I understood that it was illegal for a child to travel in the front of a car without being properly restrained.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting me right. I would regard it as the gravest offence for a parent or someone transporting children to allow a child to travel unrestrained in a vehicle.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale referred to seat belts being used to restrain children in cars, but I am thinking of baby seats that are sold to the public. Many of the straps are complex—and ineffective because they can slip. The Bill would do something about that—the seats would have to fit snugly into the car and the straps would have to be comfortable for the children who are restrained. The straps should also be non-slip and be designed so that a child could not slip out or be thrown around while being driven. That is an important consideration for the health and comfort of children.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale mentioned booster cushions. It was valuable for the House and for the implementation of what I am sure will soon be an Act that he drew a distinction between booster cusions and house cushions. I am sure that people will never be stopped from doing this, but people often run from their house and push a cushion under a child so that he can sit more comfortably. I am glad that that will not become more difficult under the Bill.

I stress that pram cots, which can be lifted from their perambulator bases and frames, should also be included in the Bill, although perhaps not by name. Carrycots are named in the Bill, and pram tops are the equivalent to carrycots for many parents. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that, but I hope that the Bill means that pram tops and carrycots cannnot be placed on the rear seat of a car so that they could slip forwards.

Perhaps that cannot be written into the Bill legally because it would be too complex, but I hope that prams and carrycots could be required to have a non-slip base and that parents could be pressed into putting them on flat surfaces so that they cannot slip. Unfortunately pram tops and carrycots can slide about, which has obvious dangers.

I hope that the Bill will be passed as quickly as possible. It is vital that we safeguard children's safety in all forms of vehicles and the Bill will do just that. I congratulate my right hon. Friend once again and wholeheartedly support the Bill.

12.27 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): First, I am delighted that, fortuitously—because my Licensing Reform Bill is to be discussed later today, I happened to be in London—I saw that this valuable Bill was due for consideration.

I support the Bill wholeheartedly not only because—like the majority of hon. Members—I have an interest in road safety and in reducing the casualties on our roads—particularly child casualties—but because I have a five-year-old son. For the past five years, I have struggled with the complexities of fitting the appropriate child safeguards into the back of our two cars. The after-sales service and guidance that my wife and I have been able to glean from the sellers of those appliances has been poor, to say the least. We have certainly not been provided with specific advice on the type of equipment that is appropriate for various ages and weights of children. The Bill will improve the efficiency of the retailers of such child safety appliances, so that the after-sales service and the guidance that they give parents on such an important topic is dramatically improved.

It is not really part of my political philosphy to liberalise, to deregulate and to ensure that the Government allow citizens to make as many important decisions as possible on various aspects of their lives, but there is no doubt that legislation relating to safety and seat belts is desirable. Since 1973, tens of thousands of lives have been saved and tens of thousands of injuries avoided through the wearing of seat belts.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) who introduced the Bill that requires the wearing of seat belts by children under 14 in the back seats of cars, which came into operation on 1 September 1989. On 28 March 1990, the then Minister for Roads and Traffic issued a press release which said that, even within the six months from September 1989, there was conclusive evidence that no fewer than 200 young people had their lives saved, or had avoided serious injury, as a result of that Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) is seeking to extend the scope of that Bill, and I believe that the effects of that will be equally valuable.

I urge the Government to consider further incentives, such as advertising campaigns or possibly grants, to encourage people to fit rear safety belts. In 1990, 43 per cent. of cars still did not possess rear safety belts. The

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

Government should consider ways of encouraging people to fit such safety belts in older cars produced before 1987 so that the Bill can also apply to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) asked about the statistics on the wearing of safety belts by children in cars. In 1989, the latest year for which figures are available, no fewer than 10,000 child passengers suffered injury or death as a result of car accidents. No fewer than 908 of them suffered serious injuries and 59 were killed. Statistics for the same year also show that, of the 10,000 children who were injured, 4,864 were injured in cars in which there were no seat belts, or, if available, they were not worn by the children. No fewer than 34 children were killed in cars when they were not wearing seat belts or those belts were not available. Those figures represent a serious problem, and one which the Bill will address.

There is no doubt that parents now appreciate the wisdom of various child seat restraints. Between 1988 and 1989, the sales of such restraints rose by 30 per cent. The market for original seat belt fittings—those fitted at the point of manufacture—is worth £35 million a year. The market for fitting safety belts in those cars that started life without them is worth £50 million a year. Of that £85 million, no less than 75 per cent. relates specifically to restraints made for children. The market is valuable, and hence this is a valuable Bill.

As I have said, the after-sales service that manufacturers and retailers gave parents leaves much to be desired. The fact that the Bill requires British and European standards must improve the after-sales service. I applaud that requirement.

In an article in the April-June 1990 edition of *Good Motoring* magazine entitled "Safety Matters", David Williams, the road safety officer for the Guild of Motorists, said:

"For children under 12 months, a 'suitable restraint' is either a rear facing infant carrier or a carrycot which is held in place in the car by straps. As soon as the baby is strong enough to sit up—normally 6-9 months—an approved child safety seat can also be used. A 'suitable restraint' for children aged from one year to three years is a child safety seat, a child harness, or an adult seat belt used in conjunction with an approved booster cushion. Children above this age, up to 13 years, may wear any rear seat belt which may be fitted, but once again for smaller children it is safer to use the seat belt with a booster cushion to ensure the belt fits correctly across the child's shoulder and hips."

I apologise for that long quotation, but it illustrates the enormous variety of equipment available and the way in which it matches children's weights and ages. When I bought a child car seat five years ago, I was never informed about the variety of equipment but was simply sold a child bucket seat that was meant to be appropriate for children from the age of three months to nine years, which seemed to be an enormous age span. My active young son did not always find it comfortable. Therefore, it sometimes became loose, which could have been fatal in a serious accident. If the Bill brings about a better after-sales and information service for parents, it will do much to reduce child casualties on the roads.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend might wish to comment on that aspect of child bearing. When one takes a baby home from hospital for the first time with no instructions on the packaging, it could be helpful if hospitals informed parents of first-born children about safety restraints. The first occasion on which parents must consider how to bring up a child is often when they take it home from hospital so hospitals could play a role in that respect.

Mr. Coombs: That good advice is particularly apposite in my case. My son, Alexander, was born in the middle of the heaviest snow fall in the west midlands for five years, and my wife and I had to drive him home in conditions that were not generally regarded as ideal. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that matter when he replies.

Many safety improvements could be put in train by car manufacturers, such as improving the cushioning on steering wheels, which cause serious chest injuries in crashes. Other improvements could include better side and front impact protection, which often affects children and, even more important for children, better seating. The front seats of many cars have insufficient padding which if a child restraint does not work, can mean potentially serious consequences. Changes should be made on the basis of EC directives and national regulations, given the trade in cars and the increasing movement of foreigners and of British people to and from Europe through the channel tunnel.

The manufacturers have a great role to play in making safety improvements which will complement the aims of the Bill. Volvo, as other hon. Members have mentioned, already makes a significant marketing play of the framework of its cars in selling them on the ground of safety. I wish Volvo well, even though it is not a British manufacturer. I hope that many British manufacturers will follow Volvo's example.

It is incumbent on the Government to urge car manufacturers to incorporate child restraints in the original design of cars. If they do, they should give sufficient instructions to parents on fitting. If Jaguar can provide a tape cleaner that is specific to Jaguar, there is no reason why other manufacturers cannot provide child restraints that are specific to their cars, and all the safer for that.

Magistrates courts should be made aware of the concern of the House and of the nation as a whole about irresponsible drivers who drive too fast or too recklessly, endangering not only their own lives, but those of child passengers. In 1989, there were no fewer than 7,000 prosecutions and convictions for failing to wear a safety belt. There is a strong case for courts to be required to take into account, on the advice of the Lord Chancellor, whether there were children in the car at the time and whether there were children who were not wearing safety belts even though they were provided. That would cause irresponsible drivers and irresponsible parents some moments of reflection on the consequences of their irresponsible driving on innocent victims—their own children in their own cars. That would be an important and worthwhile measure. I once again congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale on what I am sure will be a valuable measure when it is undoubtedly enacted.

12.42 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on choosing so valuable a measure to bring before the House. In 100 years, it may be difficult to see what most of us have

achieved in the House. However, it will be easy to see what my right hon. Friend has achieved. If the Bill is enacted, he will have saved the lives of a significant number of children. I can think of no better or greater achievement. I suspect that my right hon. Friend will have many other achievements by which he will be remembered, but he should be especially proud of the Bill.

Experience has shown that the saga of seat belts for children has been useful and valuable. Many people used to say that it was impossible to force children to wear seat belts in the back of cars. In saying that, they were overstating their case. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) introduced legislation on the issue. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle for what he achieved.

The question is not whether one should try to force one's child to wear a seat belt. In the child's mind, the question is whether it is normal to wear a seat belt. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) introduced valuable legislation on headgear for riding. In that case, too, the question was not whether one should force people to wear headgear when they went riding but whether one should encourage them to do so and whether it was normal and acceptable for them to do so. My hon. Friend's Bill was valuable in the same way as the present Bill is valuable. Normality rules children's lives in a way that we as adults may not fully understand. If I drive a car—perhaps on a private field—without wearing a seat belt, I feel uncomfortable; I feel wrong. I know that my four-year-old son also feels wrong if he travels in a car without wearing a seat belt. Far from having to be forced to wear his seat belt, he reminds me to do it up properly. When I have done his seat belt up, he makes me put on my own seat belt when I get into the driving seat—he is a right little Hitler. He now feels that wearing a seat belt is as natural as my turning the steering wheel; it is something that goes with driving. I welcome the Bill because it will normalise the wearing of seat belts.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer my questions without any difficulty. The Government have set themselves a target of reducing road casualties by about a third by the year 2000. How does Britain's record compare with those of other countries in Europe? I believe that our road casualties are much lower than in many of them. My hon. Friend the Minister looks extremely confident about that.

The Bill will contribute only partially to reducing road casualties. What other steps do the Government propose to take—for example, to improve vehicle design? My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest said that casualties could be reduced significantly through better side impact protection. Perhaps early agreement can be reached in the European Community to introduce new measures as quickly as possible. We could have safer steering wheels, car fronts less dangerous to pedestrians and so on. If other member states opposed such new measures, it could be pointed out to them that our record is a great deal better than any of theirs.

Recently, I visited Israel and I had one of the most terrifying few days that I have had in my life—not because I was afraid of Scud attacks, although it was the middle of January, but because some of the driving on Israeli roads is terrifying. Perhaps the Israelis' driving methods and safety regulations are merely different from ours, but they could well learn a lesson from Britain, as could many of the European Community countries. Safer cars should be introduced as soon as possible, and my right hon. Friend's Bill makes a valuable contribution.

I mentioned Volvo's incorporation of child seats in its vehicles. The name "Volvo" has now been mentioned four times in the debate and that may encourage other car manufacturers, who may realise that some good advertising is to be had from the introduction of good safety measures because the name of the product concerned is repeatedly mentioned in the House. I have no axe to grind. I am not a consultant for Volvo and I do not drive a Volvo. I drive a British car. Nevertheless, Volvo has introduced some significant safety measures and I hope that other manufacturers will follow its example and provide integrated child seats.

It has been suggested that car seats are sometimes not properly fitted by parents. I suspect that I have been guilty of that and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest suggested that he has also been guilty. Perhaps the Minister can offer advice to parents on how to ensure that safety restraints are correctly installed. I can imagine nothing worse than parents going out of their way to ensure that a child is not injured or, worse, killed by strapping the child as they think correctly, only to discover that they had not done it properly and that correct fitting would have resulted in no injury or at least reduced injury.

I understand that the Government intend soon to publish statistical information showing the involvement in road accidents of different car makes and models. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that. If such information is available will it take into account the fact that there are more Ford Sierras on the road than there are Lamborghinis? If it fails to take that into account Lamborghinis will be improperly low on a list of cars involved in road casualties and we could find most of the population rushing out to buy them! The survey must take into account the prevalence of certain makes of car.

12.51 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I join in the congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on an important Bill. He told us that the Bill was 16th in the list. It was obviously his experience as a former Chief Whip that enabled him to make progress where ordinary hon. Members would not have stood a chance. That shows the advantage of such experience. It is unusual for a former Chief Whip, whose job is often to ensure that many private Bills do not reach the statute book, to promote such legislation. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on the cross-party support that he received from the three major parties in the House. I give credit to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who is in his place.

I shall deal with questions about the Bill before speaking about its provisions. My hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) spoke about the effect that their children have on them when driving. I took my son to see his grandma. On our way back we were stopped by the police who wanted to make sure that we were wearing our seat belts. I am glad to say that my son was correctly restrained in the back seat. That spot check had a tremendous effect on him and every time that he is in the car he makes sure that his seat belt is on. If it is not

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

he thinks that he will go to prison. He also makes sure that I wear mine. There is a great deal that we need to get over to our children and if we get it over early enough, they will set an example and make sure that everybody else is restrained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest spoke about the difficulties facing parents when they embark upon the process of fitting seat belts and restraints. He also spoke about the conflicting advice that is available. As I shall explain, the Bill will go a long way towards improving advice to parents and making sure that they fit the correct equipment. As my hon. Friend says, much equipment is available and sometimes information about it is not in the concise form that parents need to enable them to make the right decision. He is right that it is not a question of money. If a person has the wealth to own a car, he has the wealth to provide restraints and ensure that his children are properly strapped in the back and people are safe inside it. That is an important point. Small sums of money are involved compared with the capital outlay on a car. That is why, in answer to my hon. Friend's question, we do not believe that it is necessary to provide Government help towards installing restraints.

My hon. Friend asked about the Government's intention to reduce casualties by one third by the year 2000. There is potential to improve car occupant protection, for example by side impact protection and safer steering wheels. Children in cars, as well as adults, would benefit from that. Car fronts could be designed to make them safer to pedestrians, including child pedestrians. Lighting of vehicles and rider protection for motor cyclists could be improved. It is extraordinary that no motor cycle manufacturer offers leg protection as an option even for those who want to take advantage of it. We have calculated that, when widely introduced into the vehicle fleet, such measures could prevent a quarter of the deaths and serious injuries on the roads in European Community countries. My hon. Friend is right—that is our objective by the year 2000. As more traffic comes on to the roads it will be an even greater challenge. The Government want to meet that challenge, not resile from it.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Leg protecters on motor cycles may have disadvantages as well as advantages. They may make a motor cyclist more dangerous because he feels safter enclosed in a motor cycle and takes more risks. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, who is a fervent motor cyclist, could no doubt confirm that.

Mr. McLoughlin: I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has strong views on this matter. Manufacturers should provide leg protecters so that people have the choice. That is what we are talking about at the initial stage. I am impressed by what I have seen of the work being done to develop leg protecters that do not spoil the appearance of the motor cycle. I have received many letters from constituents on that issue. I shall not tempt my right hon. Friend by expanding on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford asked whether the Government intend to publish statistical information showing road casualties involving different car makes. I confirm that the Government will shortly publish statistics on casualty rates showing the percentage represented by every make and model of car. They will be the first in a series of statistics and I hope they will help to raise motorists' consciousness of the importance of vehicle safety. I accept my hon. Friend's warnings about the Lamborghini factor. I assure him that we shall take account of the weightings and the use of cars so as not to confuse Lamborghinis with Ford Sierras.

I hope that I have answered the main questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) asked why Northern Ireland is not included in the Bill. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, this is an amendment to the Road Traffic Act 1988, which does not include Northern Ireland. Therefore, there is an exemption clause for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Although it will be difficult, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the Minister will consider what can be done about children travelling in horse-drawn vehicles. At present there are no safety measures to protect them. As the use of these vehicles is, I am glad to say, on the increase once again, it would be to the advantage of children if something were done on this score to prevent some of the accidents that are beginning to occur.

Mr. McLoughlin: I know that my hon. Friend feels strongly about that and we may give it further consideration at some stage—but the Bill deals with motor vehicles.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I may have been inattentive for a moment and missed the Minister dealing with this point, but even though it may not be directly related to the Bill or to the Minister's Department, it is important to remember my point about advice from the Lord Chancellor's Department to magistrates on how they should regard dangerous or careless driving of cars with child occupants, whether or not they are restrained. I profoundly believe that irresponsible people who drive carelessly or dangerously with children on board should be more severely punished by the courts, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend passed on that message to the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall make sure that my hon. Friend's point is drawn to the attention of the appropriate quarters. Often it is not that parents are uncaring; they simply do not realise the dangers facing their children in the back of cars. I am sometimes horrified to see children standing between mother and father near the windscreen. If those cars had to brake suddenly, the consequences would be devastating. We must do as much as we can to put this message across, because the consequences of failure to understand it, as we know from the newspapers, are frequently tragic.

Despite the recent reduction in car passenger casualties due to the rapidly increasing use of seat belts in the rear as well as the front of cars, children remain especially vulnerable. More than 10,000 child passengers are injured each year; in the case of children under five, deaths and injuries inside cars represent as much as half of all deaths and injuries for the age group in all types of road accident.

The Government fully support the provisions of the Bill and believe that it will make an important contribution to improving the quality and use of child restraints. It will also ensure that the restraints that are sold are approved to well recognised and accepted safety standards. Provision is also being made requiring correct information on installation and use of the restraints provided. One of the best things that parents and others in charge of children can do to minimise the risk of injury is to ensure that they are sitting properly in proper child restraints for which full instructions on installation and use have been provided.

There has been a considerable improvement in the quality and range of child restraints in the past few years. Anyone who has been a parent of young children in that time will have noticed the improvement in what is available in the shops. Like my hon. Friends, I pay tribute to Volvo. The organisation Kwik Fit Euro Ltd. now fits child safety seats and I have used the organisation on a number of occasions. I am one of those who like to get in a car, turn the key and drive off; I do not understand what happens under the bonnet.

It is good that manufacturers are turning their attention to what can be done. Nevertheless the improvement in availability carries problems of its own. First, it is often hard to be sure what is the best equipment for a child. To minimise the risk of injury, not only should the correct restraint be used for a particular size and weight of child, but some restraints are more suitable for some cars than others. It is vital that that information is made properly available to parents. I understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest about the great variety of equipment available for children and specifically for different makes of car.

There is considerable evidence that many restraints are not properly installed. For example, if seat belts are too slack to provide proper protection in the event of an accident, that often appears to be the result of inadequate instructions to the parent. Although parents are now generally much more aware of the benefits of child restraints more needs to be done to explain the benefits of child restraints because far too many children are inadequately restrained, if restrained at all, when travelling. Recent measures in the House have helped in that respect and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) for being the motivating force behind recent legislation requiring the wearing of seat belts and restraints by children.

That legislation, introduced in September 1989, required children under the age of 14 to wear selt belts or appropriate child restraints in the rear of cars and taxis. As a result, the number of child restraints in rear seats has doubled. It is estimated that nearly 200 deaths or serious injuries were prevented in the first year that that legislation was in force. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle should take some credit for that.

Those measures represent part of the wider effort to reduce road casualties. As the House knows, we have set ourselves the target of reducing road casualties by one third between the mid-1980s and the year 2000. That is an ambitious target in the face of the increase in road traffic, but we have achieved considerable success. Deaths and serious injuries have continued to decrease despite the increase in road traffic. We must continue our efforts and a significant further improvement can be achieved by a range of improvements in vehicle design. I have already referred to vehicle design improvements; we pay tribute to the manufacturers making those improvements and we press other manufacturers to take similar action. I hope that the statistical information will give manufacturers a greater incentive to consider safety.

However, some of the measures require agreement within the European Community. In the past it has not been easy to secure that, partly, it seems, becasue there is insufficient general understanding of the potential benefits from improved car design. There has also been a rather curious argument that because most accidents are in some sense the responsibility of the driver, all the effort should be devoted to educating drivers into better driving habits rather than into improving car design. That is a rather fatuous argument. Of course, we need to put great efforts into improving driving habits, but improvements in vehicle design still have a vital role in reducing the consequences of driver error when it occurs.

In the past year or two, however, there seems to have been a welcome shift in public attitudes towards car safety. I pay tribute to the efforts of the Lex company in highlighting that issue in what has become a series of annual public attitude surveys. The Government's hope is that this increased public wish for safer roads and vehicles will translate itself into considerably swifter action in the European Community towards improvement in vehicle construction standards. The European Commission is already playing a part in that through its proposals on child restraints. However, there is a need to go further and urgently agree proposals on the other aspects of vehicle design that I have highlighted.

With the increased public awareness of the need for vehicle safety and the growing use of safety equipment for restraining children, the Bill has been introduced at a most appropriate time. It will build on the road safety improvements contained in the Road Traffic Act 1988 and provide a further measure for limiting casualties. The death or injury of a child in a road accident is tragic. It is our responsibility to do all that we can to prevent such tragedies. The Government are convinced that this welcome Bill will do just that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

1.9 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is with great pleasure that I move the motion, as I am a member of the Scottish Crofters Union and was born and brought up on a croft. I took up this issue before I came to the House, in the context of the campaign being fought by the Scottish Crofters Union, and I have raised the issue on frequent occasions in the House, as my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) will know, as he served with me on the Committee that considered the Farmland and Rural Development Bill in which this topic was raised.

Over the years the Government have moved from giving support in principle to giving support in practice. I acknowledge the Government's help and assistance. I acknowledge also the help and assistance of officials in the Scottish Office in the drafting and preparation of the Bill. Thanks are due also to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) who placed the Bill before the House in the last Session, thereby giving the public a chance to consider their comments before it was again moved in this Session.

Great thanks are due to the Scottish Crofters Union, the Scottish Landowners Federation and the Crofters Commission, which worked together in a co-operative and constructive spirit to put flesh on the bones of the original ideas that were presented some years ago. Thanks are due to various environmental organisations that have given advice during the preparation of the Bill and during its progress through the House. In particular, I refer to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the World Wide Fund for Nature. Thanks are due also to several local authorities, including the Western Isles islands council and Highland regional council for their comments and support.

The Bill complements two defined trends in forestry policy over the past decade. The first trend is the increasing emphasis on private planting. Over the past decade the Forestry Commission's estate agency has been responsible for only one third of new forest planting. The Bill, in giving forestry powers to crofting townships, would be in keeping with that trend. Obviously, that trend commends itself to the Government, but, in so far as my Bill would also introduce a new sector of private planting by local townships, it also commends itself to this side of the House.

We should not forget that in socialist Sweden and socialist Finland, 50 per cent. of woodland—that is, woodland outside the control of large companies—is privately controlled. Those countries have a developed system of farm forestry. Much of the continent has a developed system of local farm forestry. We lack such a system. I hope that the Bill will begin to introduce such a system on a considerable scale in the highlands of Scotland. Also, on the increasing trend to private planting, my Bill would give the Government a new option in privatising or selling off various assets currently held by the Forestry Commission.

As the Minister knows, for several years the Government have engaged in considerable sales of Forestry Commission land and wood plots. The enactment of my Bill would give the Government new and alternative purchasers or private owners of Forestry Commission estates which would be an alternative to the usual recourse to speculators or large companies that are not based in the highlands and islands where most of the sales take place. As the Government seem determined to continue that trend, I hope that they will seriously consider the practicalities of allowing portions of the forestry estates to be given to crofting townships so that control can be retained in the local communities.

The second trend of forestry in the 1980s which I believe that my Bill complements is the desire, which has not yet become practice, to shift away from an alien monoculture, in the hills which has the sole aim, of maximising the timber yield for some notional strategic reason, such as the national economy needing to make up the deficit in timer imports. I hope that we shall move away from that monoculture, which serves a single aim, towards a more flexible, multi-purpose vision of forestry, which will chase after other goals, such as amenity, nature conservation and the rehabilitation of degraded and exhausted soils. Equally important, given that public money will be required to maintain a healthy forestry sector, the goals of public access and aesthetics should be at least two of the targets of that multi-purpose approach to forestry.

It might help the House if I quickly summarise the basic objectives of my Bill. It seeks to enable crofting townships to engage in forestry and tree planting and to derive benefits from trees planted on common grazings controlled by the townships. The Bill includes various safeguards which accompany the increased powers for the grazing committee. The first safeguard is contained in what I hope will become subsection (1E), which will provide that the grazings committee cannot exercise its new power

"in such a way that the whole of the common grazing is planted with trees and used as woodlands."

The RSPB has expressed its concern that the acreage of common grazing that is planted in that way should not be such as to impinge on the environmental quality of the grazing. Although subsection (1E) will provide one safeguard, clause 1(2) contains the second safeguard that the approval of the Crofters Commission is required before any planting on common grazing is undertaken. The commission has a duty to safeguard the integrity of crofting in the long term and will consider those factors and, I hope, factors such as environmental quality before approving any approach. I hope that when the Bill is enacted the Crofters Commission, the Scottish Crofters Union, the Scottish Landowners Federation and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland will co-operate in drawing up an advice pamphlet that the townships can use before embarking on any forestry projects. Such a pamphlet could include advice not only about where to obtain financial support and so on but about the type and scale of forestry to be undertaken. In preparing that pamphlet, the advice of groups interested in the development of responsible and proper forestry, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the new Scottish Natural Heritage, would be taken into account.

A further safeguard in respect of the new power for crofting townships is that the consent of the landlord will be required before the township can proceed. That safeguard was specifically included at the request of the

Scottish Landowners Federation, which has been co-operative and constructive in the preparation of the Bill.

Clause 2 largely deals with the technical consequences of giving crofting townships the new power. One such consequence is that the landowner will no longer have the power of resumption of common grazing land while it is being used as woodland. Another is that common grazing woodland would be excluded from the definition of permanent improvements. Those technical measures are necessary to safeguard against hypothetical, rather than likely, possibilities.

Clause 3 enables crofting townships to have access to the support payments that are available for forestry through the Forestry Act 1979 and the Farm Land and Rural Development Act 1988 while they are engaged in forestry.

It may be helpful to the House if I give some general statistics on the extent of common grazing in the highlands and islands, to give some notion of the general impact of the Bill. There are almost 18,000 crofts in the highlands and islands. The vast majority of those are in the northern and western isles. Indeed, my constituency has almost half the total number of crofts in the highlands and islands, although it does not necessarily have half the total acreage of crofting land because the average acreage of crofts in the islands and on the Scottish mainland varies dramatically.

Taking the list of members of the Scottish Crofters Union as an indication of the number of active crofters, there are about 5,000 active crofters in the highlands and islands, of whom 95 per cent. have a non-agricultural occupation to complement the income that they obtain from crofting. It should be emphasised that crofting is not subsistence agriculture, but an example of a diversified approach to the rural economy which is becoming more relevant as reforms of the common agricultural policy become urgent.

The average income gained from crofts is about £1,500 per annum. That is usually from holding a small flock of sheep. The average number of sheep per active crofter is about 30. A croft consists of a small area of inbye land and a share in grazing land held in common by several crofters who share a township. The total amount of land held in crofting tenure—both inbye land and common grazing land—in the Highlands and Islands development board area is about 15 to 20 per cent. of the total land area. The typical inbye land area is five to 10 hectares. There is a legal maximum of 20 hectares, of which I was unaware until I researched the Bill. There are 753 separate common grazing areas, covering 573,880 hectares in the highlands and islands. The average size of each individual common grazing is between five and 1,000 acres. The number of shareholders in a common grazing area can vary between 10 and 100.

In evidence to the Select Committee on Agriculture during its inquiry into forestry and land use, Dr. Jim Hunter, the director of the Scottish Crofters Union, said that of a common grazing area of 1,000 acres, as many as 400 acres could come under timber in the long term without reducing its stock-carrying capacity. The stock-carrying capacity is low because of the effects of exposure. The planting of the right kind of woodland would not necessarily displace the grazing function because woodland would contribute shelter, so would enhance its stock-carrying capacity. The figure of 400 acres in every 1,000 is a long-term figure dependent on the system of financial support and incentives as it evolved over time. It is my firm belief that the system should be designed to achieve the many purposes of forestry to which I have already alluded.

Some are sceptical about the financial viability of crofter forestry and whether it will be worth while for crofters to engage in forestry. In March 1987 George Campbell, who is the new director of the Scottish Crofters Union, but who was then a student at the North of Scotland college of agriculture, wrote a paper called, "The Feasibility and Viability of Small Scale Afforestation on North West Highland Crofts". The paper was part of his degree course. He showed conclusively that trees offered a higher return than sheep even in the most marginal areas, although not enough of a return to offset the increased managerial input and work required for managing woodland as opposed to looking after sheep.

Two subsequent developments make the forestry proposition even more attractive compared with sheep. The farm woodland scheme, which is already in place, provides a new source of income to farmers engaged in forestry. It was not available when George Campbell made his study. The second development, which I hope will come about, is the passage of this Bill which would make it much easier for crofters to engage in forestry, so making it financially viable.

There are various sources of finance available to crofters if they are enabled to engage in forestry. As well as providing various plantation or planting grants for different kinds of trees, the farm woodland scheme provides an annual payment of £30 per hectare up to a maximum of 40 hectares. I quote the figure for severely disadvantaged areas, which is much less than the annual management figure available for farmers in better areas.

After the passage of the Bill, I shall be pressing for the support given to farmers in less advantaged areas to be increased, perhaps not up to the level of that given to farmers in the best areas—given that the purpose of the farm woodland scheme is to try to attract farmers away from other types of farming activity—to make it more attractive and viable for crofters to engage in forestry.

The Forestry Commission has its own woodland grant scheme. That is another source of funding that crofting townships can access in pursuing their forestry planting. The crofting counties agricultural grants scheme provides a range of financial support for fencing, drainage and general improvements undertaken in crofting areas. That would be available for improvements made in pursuit of forestry aims as much as improvements that are currently undertaken.

There is the possibility of support from the Scottish Natural Heritage Agency. After all, the old Countryside Commission used to pay 85 per cent. of plantation costs for small plantations in national scenic areas, and some of the common grazings would be national scenic areas. That is why the Scottish Natural Agency might have a financial role to play.

A further source of financial support that I would advocate is the introduction of a forestry equivalent of the hill livestock compensatory allowance. We could call it the hill forestry compensatory allowance. It would have exactly the same justification as the allowance for livestock, which is the need to maintain populations in rural areas and disadavantaged areas. If forestry is a form

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

of economic activity that can retain rural populations, it is as justifiable to give it additional support as it is to give livestock management additional support.

Indeed, given the way in which agricultural policy seems to be evolving as we move into the next century, there is every reason to begin to promote forestry in disadvantaged areas in the way that in the past we have tried to promote livestock management in disadvantaged areas.

Another source of financial support would be the kick-start, so to speak, that would be gained from implementing my earlier suggestion that any new Forestry Commission wood lots that are privatised should be given to townships rather than speculators. That would obviously enhance the financial viability of crofter forestry.

In addition to strict financial returns, there are many other returns that crofting townships could gain from engaging in forestry. They could get shelter in the way that I described, and that would enhance the quality of the common grazing. The right kind of forestry—I stress that it must be the right kind—would improve the soil and drainage and increase grazing and so on by increasing grass growth. It would maximise the use of machinery because machinery that now lies idle for part of the year could find a dual use in forestry. Wood could over time become available for fencing and firewood.

There might in the long term be downstream activities related to the development of a local timber industry in some of the areas to which I have referred. I would also hope to see jobs arising from the enhanced amenity and environmental quality of common grazing areas.

Finally, I should like to mention my hopes for the future of crofter forestry. Many people come to the highlands imagining that it was always the bleak, treeless wind-swept landscape of today, but historically that is not so. Historically, the highlands were covered by the great Caledonian forest. Sadly, by the end of the 18th century, most of the trees had been destroyed by various encroachments—accessing wood for boat-building and, later, when the industrial revolution was under way, the use of highland trees for charcoal. Often, people are unaware that the industrial revolution had a direct impact on the ecology of the highlands and islands. In fact, various smelting processes were undertaken in various parts of the highlands. The cannonballs shot at Trafalgar were smelted in the highlands, which provided a readily accessible source of charcoal.

The impact on the ecology of the highlands and islands has been such that nowadays in Scotland only 8 per cent. of the existing forest consists of indigenous, native woodland. To take one example, the district of Inverness has lost more than 30 per cent. of its native woodland—its small precious resource—even since the war.

It is sad that the great amount of forestation undertaken in the past decade has not, by and large, replaced or enhanced the native woodland source. On the contrary, between 1971 and 1980 more than 90 per cent. of Scottish planting was of alien conifers—sitka spruce and lodgepole pine. I hope that the passage of the Bill will open up a sector of private forestry which will begin to counteract some of the less attractive trends of the past decade.

An alternative vision of forestry which I should like to see is that now being pursued by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on Isle Martin—one of the Summer Isles—which lies off Ullapool. There has been an extensive programme to regenerate the natural woodland and to plant some indigenous trees such as the downy birch, the common alder and the grey and the gold willows. They are all species that are able to grow reasonably quickly and to cope with the extremes of climate because they are all based on local seeds. They could not only provide amenities of environmental value, but would be of great value for crofting townships should they wish to follow that example.

This is a short Bill, but it could have substantial benefits for the highlands and islands, and not just economic benefits. In the fullness of time, it could have a profound effect on the environment and even on the appearance of the highlands and islands. It could redress some of the destruction wrought by man over the centuries, and one might think of the Bill as a small seed or even a sapling from which substantial consequences may grow.

1.39 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on introducing this important Bill and I acknowledge, as he did, the help that has been received from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro).

I hope that the hon. Member for Western Isles does not mind my saying that we all look on him as the respected, authentic voice of the Scottish crofting community. He speaks with the authority of someone who lives in and understands that community. The hon. Gentleman is not motivated by narrow prejudices. What is so refreshing is that he bases his approach on what he believes to be in the best interests of the crofting community and what is viable. That is evident from the Bill and what he said today.

The hon. Gentleman, in common with the rest of us, wants to keep families in those crofting communities. It is not enough for those communities to be peopled by the old because they will eventually disappear with the death of those people. It is important to create an environment in which people can bring up their children and those children can, in turn, look forward to carrying on the traditions and activities of their parents and grandparents.

The hon. Gentleman properly drew attention to the fact that the crofting community, in order to make anything work, must operate within a framework that includes landowners, environmentalists, the Crofters Commission and local authorities. He also drew attention to the constructive approach that those different bodies have taken to the Bill. They have done so because they realise that the Bill is founded on what is practical, possible, realistic and can be delivered. It is important to remember that.

The hon. Gentleman was also right to talk about the increased use of private planting, which has been much encouraged by Government policy. The hon. Gentleman is aware that I represent a large highlands constituency and I agree with him that it would be better for that region if the increasing trend towards private planting helped the local people. The hon. Gentleman and I want the local people to benefit, not someone who lives 100 miles away

who has made an investment. I have no objection to such investment, but I want the local people to be more directly involved in private planting.

The Bill provides new options, including the selling of Forestry Commission land. Crofters and farmers are the life-blood of the highland communities and if we are serious about retaining people in the highlands and islands we must consider things that can be done to keep them there. It is a case not just of making their lives economically viable, but of looking after the environment. That calls for a flexible, multi-purpose forestry policy.

There is no doubt that many of the large plantations have not always been a success in terms of their aesthetic contribution to the area and the problems that are caused to rivers and water courses. The local people know better than anyone what is viable. I am frequently astonished that authorities allow planning applications for dwellings in areas that are known to the locals as bogs that always flood. There are many examples of such planning mistakes in the highlands and the same is true of planting.

The hon. Gentleman talked about active crofters, but they will remain so only as long as we adopt a sensitive, sensible approach that enables them to continue their way of life. The management of the region and common grazing are not readily understood by most hon. Members or people who live in cities. They do not realise that crofting communities take a flexible approach to the way in which they handle such matters. Crofters' lifestyles could not continue if they were bound by written regulations. Their sensible, practical way of life has been properly organised and structured through the Crofters Commission and crofters' input at local level and it calls for a degree of flexibility which those who write legislation do not always understand. I hope that the flexible approach mentioned by the hon. Member for Western Isles will be recognised when it comes to planning and grants.

Those of us who understand how the highlands operate realise that the Bill is not intended as a means of milking the Treasury. Crofters have no desire to leave their crofts and go elsewhere, but regard the Bill as an opportunity to develop common grazing. The hon. Member for Western Isles drew attention to the fact that common grazing areas are large and often exposed and that tree plantations would provide protection. For that reason alone, the provision should be implemented. I hope that the approach to the provision of shelter will be flexible. It will improve the area's appearance, amenities and possible downstream activities and, in the short term, will provide the means for fencing.

Clause 1 contains several safeguards. Landlords must consent to common grazing. Speeches in the Chamber are often hostile to landlords, but crofters know that they could not continue their lifestyles were it not for the positive and constructive approach taken by most landlords to the Crofters Commission and the wishes of crofters. Although there are always instances of landlords who do not behave as one would wish, the vast majority take a constructive approach.

Another safeguard is that consent must be in writing. It would be wrong for permission to be given simply verbally as, sadly, words can often be distorted. Furthermore, the part where common grazing will be effective must be specified and I would not argue with that. The landlord or grazing committee must intimate a landlord's consent to the Crofters Commission. Naturally, it will not take effect until it is entered in the Register of Crofts. The matter will then be carried out properly.

Hon. Members do not often have an opportunity to speak on a measure that will help people. Although the Bill does not affect vast numbers of people, it will help those who are the life blood of Scotland. Most people who now live in Scottish cities originate from rural communities—indeed, many eminent Scots come from crofting communities. One example is my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, who is an eminent Member of the other place. He is one of the few Scots to have achieved high office in the Scottish and English legal professions. That is an achievement.

There are many other examples of people who have come from crofting families. My father managed to trace back our family to a crofting family in the western highlands. I cannot claim to know anything about crofting and it would be fraudulent for me to say otherwise. However, my father found that we came from a crofting background. Like so many other Scots after the 1745 rebellion, for reasons on which I will not touch today, my family moved to the east coast of Scotland. We retain an interest. As a Member who represents a Scottish highland constituency, I recognise that it is only through legislation such as the Bill that we can bring about changes that are viable, with the sensible use of public funds.

I stress that through the sensible use of public funds, we can help people to remain in the glens and on the islands, and to retain a way of life that we want to continue. I am often accused of being mean or monetarist, but I have never taken the view that public funds should not be used for sensible, viable projects. That is why I have no hesitation in saying that providing a means to encourage the introduction of forestry on common grazing, and a more economic and viable return for crofters is a sensible use of taxpayers' funds.

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) in congratulating the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on bringing the Bill to what I believe will be an unopposed Third Reading, and on his expertise in his speech. As he said, it is personally appropriate that he should introduce the Bill as it is the result of considerable personal work by him for a long time. I welcome and entirely agree with the unequivocal and enthusiastic support that my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North, who is no mean expert in piloting private Members' Bills on Scottish matters through the House, has given to the Bill for a number of reasons.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said in Committee, the Government fully support the Bill. It will enable grazing committees to plant trees on common grazings and to use common grazings as woodland. The hon. Member for Western Isles was right to stress the agreement between crofting and landowning interests. Some time ago, there was a broad consensus that there was a good case for facilitating commercial tree planting on common grazing without the land being taken out of crofting tenure. As the hon. Member for Western Isles has explained, the result of close co-operation between various interests has been to secure a measure that we are all

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

content to view as generally acceptable, I echo the praise of the hon. Member for Western Isles and of my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North for those involved, notably the Scottish Crofters Union, the Scottish Landowners Federation, the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the Crofters Commission and, in the public sector, the Forestry Commission and the Scottish Office.

The hon. Member for Western Isles rightly told the House that the measure has the full support of the many other bodies, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. It also has the support of the Western Isles islands council and Highland region.

The hon. Member for Western Isles was probably instrumental in securing the inclusion of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Agriculture, which in its second report for 1989-90, dealing with land use and forestry, recommended that the Government should give a higher priority to developing farm forestry as part of their wider policies for maintaining rural communities. The Committee was right to note that crofting tenants in the highlands of Scotland were a special case and said that it was convinced in principle of the need for legislative change to allow crofting forestry on common grazings. The Committee accordingly recommended that any remaining difficulties should be ironed out and that any necessary changes should be introduced without delay.

There has been consistent and considerable good will towards the Bill on all sides. I join the hon. Member for Western Isles and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North in recalling that my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) introduced the Bill last year so that the proposals contained in it might be more widely known. Everyone is delighted that the hon. Member for Western Isles was successful in the ballot and also that he chose this Bill.

Let me emphasise one or two of the key points in the Bill. It is worth stressing that the Bill does not affect existing provisions in crofting legislation, which, if the appropriate conditions are met, would allow resumption by the landlord on one hand and apportionment and decrofting by the crofter for the planting of trees on the other. Accordingly, strictly speaking, the Bill does not make more land available for planting. It makes the same land available in a different way. The Bill provides a practicable alternative that enables trees to be planted on land that remains in crofting tenure. The hon. Member for Western Isles made the valuable suggestion that we might build on the provisions in future and, the Scottish Office and the Forestry Commission will consider that possibility carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North was right to emphasise that, under the new arrangements, both the consent of the landlord and the approval of the Crofters Commission are required before planting can take place. As my hon. Friend emphasised, that provides an adequate safeguard for any landlord who may have reservations about agreeing to tree planting on his land. It also affords a degree of protection to crofters with an interest in a common grazing who have similar reservations. The terms of any agreement on planting are a matter for settlement between the landlord and the crofters undertaking the planting.

The hon. Member for Western Isles referred to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has supported the Bill but which has circulated hon. Members regarding one matter of concern to it. I confirm that we understand that in practice the RSPB's concerns can be met under the Bill.

The Bill also provides that a grazings committee will have access to forestry and farm woodlands grants on the same basis as owners and lessees under the respective schemes.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North said about the sensible use of public funds for these worthwhile schemes. The Bill's provisions mean that the statutory provisions and rules relating to those schemes will apply when considering applications under the woodland grant scheme. The Forestry Commissioners have a duty to endeavour to achieve a reasonable balance between the development of afforestation and the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage. The Scottish Office has a similar balancing duty when considering applications under the farm woodland scheme.

The hon. Member for Western Isles spoke of the practical consequences of the Bill. It is extremely difficult to forecast how much of the common grazings might be planted with trees in accordance with the Bill's provisions. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that about 500,000 hectares are held as common grazings. Much of this will be unsuitable for planting and in many areas crofters will choose not to plant because of the value of the grazings for stock management. The hon. Member for Western Isles authoritatively spelt out the economics of stock management compared with forestry.

We do not expect large-scale afforestation, but it is important to give to crofters the opportunity to plant commercial woodlands on common grazings. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North and the hon. Member for Western Isles spoke of the value of crofters. They have a long history of diversification going back to long before the word diversification was invented. I am sure that crofters will seize the opportunity in circumstances where they consider this the appropriate course to follow. I confirm that Government assistance through the relevant grant schemes will be available on the same basis as for other applicants.

The hon. Member for Western Isles suggested that the Bill should be followed by the publication of an advice leaflet which would be issued to crofters after consultation with the parties involved. That is a sensible suggestion and when the Bill reaches the statute book we shall get in touch with the hon. Gentleman to see how best that proposal can be implemented.

There is no need to go through the details of the Bill because they have been outlined by the hon. Member for Western Isles, and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North spoke about the key points of the Bill's four clauses. In relation to the timetable, I can confirm that the Act will be brought into effect by means of a commencement order. It will be necessary to check whether any adjustments to subordinate legislation, such as for the farm woodland scheme, are required and to allow time for any necessary administrative arrangements. However, it is envisaged that there will be no significant delay in bringing the new arrangements into operation.

Scottish Members are not always present in the House on Fridays, for good and understandable reasons. I hope

that the House will agree that when Scottish Members introduce private Members' Bills it is extremely worth while. The Bill is a short but important measure which has the wholehearted support of all political parties and all the interests involved. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

2.6 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is the first opportunity that we have had to debate the Bill on the Floor of the House, because the Second Reading went through on the nod. The Committee stage a fortnight ago, lasted 34 minutes. On Report, the Bill was unopposed and unamended and I hope that the House will give the Bill an unopposed Third Reading.

I move the Third Reading with a sense of sadness. The Bill was originally presented to the House by the late Donald Coleman, who came 18th in the ballot for Bills last autumn. Donald was elected in 1964 to represent the constituency of Neath. He was a senior and well-respected Member of Parliament and tributes have been paid to him. He died on 14 January on his way back to the House after the Christmas recess. I consulted the other sponsors of the Bill and his widow and we all agreed that he would have wanted us to continue with his Bill.

The Bill was conceived by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Donald was interested not least because the Bill offers considerable protection to the red kite, which is the national bird of Wales. If the Bill reaches the statute book, it will be a fitting tribute to Donald Coleman and his love of our native wildlife and countryside.

The Bill amends the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which is the prime legislation protecting wildlife in Britain. It is designed to strengthen that Act by plugging a loophole and allowing the prosecution of those who direct, or allow others to commit, offences of illegally killing wildlife. Sections 5 and 11 of the 1981 Act prohibit certain methods of killing or taking wild birds or other animals. It is an offence for any person to set in position an article of such a nature, and so place it, as to be calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild bird coming into contact with it. That includes a spring trap, gin, snare, hook and line, any electrical device for killing, stunning or frightening or any poisonous, poisoned or stupefying substance. It also outlaws other methods, including crossbows, any explosives other than ammunition for firearms, automatic and semi-automatic weapons and so on. Those offences are among the most serious that the Act creates and carry special penalties.

The Bill proposes an amendment sections 5 and 11 of the Act by the insertion of another subsection, which provides for the prosecution of any person who knowingly causes or permits those frequently horrific offences. That is necessary because the Act is clearly failing in several areas in its intention to protect Britain's wildlife. For instance, figures collected by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds show that last year alone protected species of birds of prey were involved in more than 530 incidents of poisoning, shooting, destruction or trapping. Those figures represent only the tip of the iceberg because it is difficult to obtain figures on what actually happens in the countryside. The public have limited access to many of the areas in which offences take place, and much of what is done is unreported.

[Mr. Ron Davies]

Consideration of a species that we have an international obligation to protect—the red kite—will illustrate the seriousness of what has been happening and continues to happen. In 1989, 13 poisoned red kites were found in Great Britain. As the bird nests only in central Wales and as there are only 60 breeding pairs, the prospects for the viability of the population are seriously undermined by their unlawful destruction. The Bill will ensure that those who direct or permit others to bring about the destruction of such birds will be held responsible.

I offer the House an example of a case in Scotland in 1989. It would not be right to mention the names of those involved, but following investigation by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, a gamekeeper was prosecuted and convicted for laying poisonous substances that brought about the death of legally protected birds of prey. He informed the court that he had been instructed by his employer to lay the poison. He was in fear of his job and he followed instructions. He was found guilty and convicted of the offence, but in the eyes of the law his employer had committed no offence. This Bill will close that loophole and make employers responsible for the acts of those whom they employ.

This is a straightforward, small, but nevertheless important measure. I record my thanks to the RSPB for the ground work that it has done and for the way in which it has raised public interest in the illegal persecution of birds of prey. I also thank the head of the wildlife investigation department of the RSPB, Andy Jones, who has often put himself in peril in his investigations. Thirdly, I thank the sponsors of the Bill from all parties, most of whom attended to ensure that the Bill had an unimpeded passage in Committee. Finally I thank officials in the Department of the Environment, who were most helpful with drafting the Bill and tabling the necessary technical amendments in Committee. I also thank the Under-Secretary of State who has ensured the Bill's swift and unimpeded progress thus far. It has all-party support and I hope that it will continue to make progress today.

2.13 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I fully support the Bill, as do the overwhelming majority of our colleagues who are not present today. It is a worthy Bill, but for those of us who knew him well over the years it is sad that Donald Coleman, whose Bill this was, is not here to see its swift passage through the House. He was a much-loved colleague and the passage of this Bill would have been a crowning achievement to a fine and devoted career in the House. As Father of the House, I felt that I should say that on behalf of all right hon. and hon. Members.

2.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I must apologise for the absence of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), who has asked me to stand in for him today. He has taken a long and abiding interest in the passage of the Bill.

I am sure that I echo the views of hon. Members on both sides of the House in giving the Government's wholesale support to the Bill. It is indeed sad that the late hon. Member for Neath, Mr. Coleman, was not able to see the Bill through all its parliamentary stages and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) for picking up the Bill and for his helpful and constructive approach in tabling amendments that will ensure that the Bill harmonises with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and with other legislation.

The Bill would make it an offence for a person to cause or permit another to contravene the 1981 Act's provisions which prohibit the use of certain means of killing or taking wild birds or protected species. While statutory controls in this area are already very strict, the Bill will be a welcome strengthening of the Act in that it will ensure that those persons who manage or oversee land have a responsibility to ensure that they, or their employees, do not use unlawful means to kill wildlife.

We deplore the illegal killing or taking of wild species, particularly if cruel or indiscriminate methods are used. Although the majority of farmers and landowners act responsibly and within the law, there are those who pay little regard to the consequences of using substances or methods that are inhumane and cause unnecessary suffering. Many of our endangered wild species are at risk from the indiscriminate use of poisons or other illegal methods of killing.

As the hon. Member for Caerphilly recognises, there is a case for bringing the Wildlife and Countryside Act into line with equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland and with other legislation which controls, among other things, the sale, storage and use of pesticides. The Bill will do that and will make a very useful addition to the already stringent controls over the illegal killing of protected species, especially birds of prey, and in particular the red kite.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caerphilly for his co-operation in tabling amendments to the Bill to reflect the Government's policy on the creation of "causes or permits" offences. It has always been implicit that the successful prosecution of such offences depends on evidence that the accused person had some sort of knowledge of the offence with which he was charged with causing or permitting. It is now normal practice to make that clear on the face of the legislation and it helps to clarify the courts' understanding of the nature of such offences. As amended, the Bill would make it an offence if a person knowingly caused or permitted another to contravene the Act's provisions for the protection of wildlife.

The pressures of modern-day life mean that we have to take particular care of our wildlife if we are to meet our objective of preserving its abundance and diversity. We have one of the best systems in the world in the 1981 Act to ensure that the procedures are in place to give protection where necessary. However good those measures are, they can be undermined by people who are willing to flout the law and ignore the wishes of the great majority of the public in their concern to preserve our natural heritage.

This Bill has identified a chink in our armour which it is right should be closed and it will help us to reinforce the message that we continually try to put across that the Government are determined to take all steps necessary to ensure that our objectives for protection of the national heritage and especially endangered species are met.

Hon. Members will know that the Bill has made speedy progress, thanks largely to the energetic and constructive attitude of the hon. Member for Caerphilly. We are grateful for his co-operation at all stages of the Bill and we

share his enthusiasm for amending the legislation to tighten controls to deal with those irresponsible people who persistently flout the law and cause totally unnecessary suffering to our wildlife and the death of species that do no harm. We congratulate him on taking over this very useful measure and give it our full support in its remaining stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Licensing Reform Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.18 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I beg to move, That the Bill be read a Second time.

In moving this Second Reading, I feel a little like the late great Kenneth Williams in "Just a Minute". He had 10 seconds in which to finish a minute of uninterrupted, non-repetitive and accurate speech in order to receive a bonus point. Given how near we are to the 2.30 pm conclusion to our deliberations today, I can understand how Kenneth Williams felt. I do not expect any bonus points, but I should like to try to persuade hon. Members who may have reservations about the measure—my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) may be one of them—of the importance of the Bill and the necessity for it to be adequately considered in Committee.

Having started its life as a ten-minute Bill last December, the Bill received all-party support—it was carried without dissent—despite the fact that licensing legislation is a particularly sensitive matter. I am as aware as anybody else of the effect of alcohol on crime, occasional disorder in our streets and on more everyday problems for residents in the vicinity of licensed premises. I am aware also of the moralistic and even Quaker overtones that discussion of licensing legislation occasionally evokes, particularly as I come from the originally Quaker city of Birmingham.

As I said in December, the prime purpose, or even the secondary purpose, of the measure is not to relax the licensing legislation. I made it plain that I supported the measures in the Licensing Act 1988, which increased powers for licensing magistrates to revoke a licence when its conditions had plainly been broken, with only 21 days notice instead of going before the next Brewster sessions. I also supported the Government's action because it was taken to make it easier to prosecute under-age drinkers.

As well as having a duty to protect citizens against the excesses of alcohol consumption, we have a duty to our fellow citizens who are applicants for licences, and a duty to consumers. Any fair licensing system should be transparent, objective, not subject to prejudice, open to the extent that reasons for decisions are given to applicants as speedily as possible, and act in a way that is likely to promote competition rather than act against it.

It is an unsatisfactory aspect of present licensing legislation that effectively all power, with the exception of legal appeals which are extremely expensive, is in the hands of an only indirectly elected bench which has total discretion in decisions that are taken. Lord Widgery, when considering the Licensing Act 1964, said that so long as magistrates exercised that total discretion in England—though not in Scotland—honestly, fairly and consistently, they would do so within the law. The present licensing system, which gives total discretion to licensing magistrates, requires reform, as other people have also said. The Birmingham licensing bench, one of the most restrictive in the country according to the Licensing Justices' Clerks Association, said:

"The time has come for Parliament to instigate a detailed study of the licensing laws with a view to wholesale reform."

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

The Erroll committee was set up by the Government in 1988 to examine licensing reform in this country. In July last year, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department wrote to me saying:

"We do recognise that there is a good case for wholesale reform and updating of the liquor licensing system."

Courage brewers, which may not be thought to have an interest in making the licensing system more competitive, wrote to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1989, asking for reform

"particularly with regard to the removal of the 'need' criterion".

Given that the removal of that "need" criterion is the most important aspect of this Bill, we should bear those comments in mind.

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd., has also called for the reform of the licensing system. Perhaps most telling of all, the Consumers Association stated in its evidence to the MMC:

"The system of licensing of pubs is antiquated and anti-competitive. It should be reformed so as solely to take regard of the fitness of the applicant and the suitability of the premises."

The association emphasised that the criterion of economic need should not weigh with the licensing magistrates.

Nowhere over the past 10 years has the oppressive use of the potential power of the licensing magistrates been more in evidence than in Birmingham. I use the word "oppressive" advisedly. *The Birmingham Post* has rightly brought to the attention of the people of Birmingham many of the extraordinary decisions of the Birmingham licensing bench. The editor of *The Licensing Review*, which is an objective magazine on these matters, has said that there is "a great concern" about certain policies adumbrated by the Birmingham licensing bench.

It is sad to note that since the First Reading of the Bill the Birmingham licensing bench, even under its new chairman—the old chairman was voted off last year—has decided that there will not be any review of its licensing policies despite two meetings, the offer of an objective review by the Francis Graves Partnership, the virtual uproar in the city, and the all-party resolutions of Birmingham city council in favour of such a review.

Too often, the present licensing system is arbitrary, insensitive, restrictive and anti-competitive. It is interesting that Cornfield Associates, an expert in this area, stated in its representations to the MMC that it is because the Birmingham licensing bench has used its "economic need" powers in a restrictive way that Birmingham sees a virtual duopoly—an anti-competitive duopoly—between M & B, Bass, and Ansells, Allied, for the off-licence market.

My Bill has four provisions. The first is patent in any democratic society. It seeks to require licensing benches to give their reasons for the refusal of a licence. Anybody who, at a cost of hundreds or even thousands of pounds, seriously seeks a licence for a business enterprise should, if the licence is refused, at least be given the opportunity of knowing why. That is surely not unreasonable.

Although my hon. Friend the Minister wrote to me stating:

"Many benches are prepared to advise applicants of their reasons for reaching decisions",

the Home Office—or the Lord Chancellor—has no power to require them to do so. Indeed, the clerk of my own licensing Bench in north Worcestershire has said exactly the opposite:

"It is not usual or a requirement that justices should give an explanation or reasons for their decisions."

That is scandalous in a democratic country. I hope that any future reformed licensing system in this country adopts the practice in Scotland where it is mandatory to give reasons for the refusal.

The second reform in my Bill is to set a time limit for the consideration of decisions by licensing magistrates. The third reform is to set a time limit on the period for which a licensing justice may chair the licensing justices committee. One justice in Birmingham held the position for 22 years. Although I do not impugn his integrity, I cannot believe that a system can be truly objective and balanced if the same person rules, virtually as a fiefdom, the same city for licensing purposes for 22 years. People are bound to have a prejudiced or jaundiced view of either the licensing justice or potential applicants. It is unhealthy.

My Bill, as in many other licensing justice jurisdictions——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Monday 25 March.

Private Members' Bills

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 19 April.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 April.

NATIONAL AUDIT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Dixon: With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 19 April.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 April.

PARISH COUNCILS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Dixon: With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 19 April.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 April.

EDUCATION PROVISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 April.

COAL IMPORTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Dixon: With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 19 April.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 April.

PUBLIC SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [8 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 3 May.

COURTS (RESEARCH) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

COMMUNITY CHARGES (GENERAL REDUCTION) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 27th March, the Motion in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to British Nationality may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock, and if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question necessary to dispose of them.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 15th April, the Motion in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Education (Scotland) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock, and if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question necessary to dispose of them.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17th April, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) and Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), the Motions in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Community Charges may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock, and if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Questions necessary to dispose of them.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Housing (Hackney)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

2.32 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): When I leave the House this afternoon I shall return to my constituency to hold my weekly advice session. I have held an advice session almost every week of the year for the four years during which I have been a Member of Parliament. Every week there is a long queue. Every week I have to deal with the issues that people raise and the issue most raised is housing. I have had four years to see at close hand the misery, unhappiness, suffering and social problems caused by poor housing. I have had four years to see at close hand the misery, unhappiness, suffering and social problems caused by poor housing. I have had four years to come to the conclusion that nothing less is called for than a new initiative on housing in London.

When I say that housing causes misery, I am not talking about people who are mildly irritated because they cannot have a bigger garden or an extra bedroom. I am talking about the people who come to me every week who live in flats that are riddled with damp and where all the outside walls are covered with black mould on the inside. Whatever wallpaper or paint is put on the walls is overcome by the black mould. How many Members of Parliament would wish to live in damp conditions with mould on the walls?

I am talking about constituents who come to see me and burst into tears because they are so depressed by their housing conditions, including overcrowding. It is not by any means unusual for families of six or eight all to live in a two-bedroomed flat. I have to tell them that there is no immediate prospect of their being rehoused. I ask hon. Members to think what it is like for a child in such a household. It is not just that the child does not have his or her own bed or any privacy, but where is the child to do homework? The effects of poor housing and overcrowding on child development and educational standards in my borough are incalculable.

Constituents who come to me are without hope and at the end of their tether because of the housing in which they are forced to live. The tragedy is that I can offer them no hope. We have problems of homelessness. Some constituents live in severely overcrowded conditions with relatives; others live in hostels; and some have nowhere to sleep but the street. I wish that I had some way of conveying to the Minister personally the misery and tragic circumstances of thousands of people in Hackney. If I could do so, he would not reply, as I fear he will do so today, with the Government's normal platitudes on the subject. For four years I have sat through housing debates in the House and the Government undoubtedly either do not understand or choose not to understand the unique problems of inner-city areas. Inner-city housing is a special policy case to which the Government are resolutely blind.

The Government insist that the solutions to housing problems generally must lie increasingly with the private sector. Anybody who lives in Hackney or who has passed an estate agent's window there knows that that is either sheer callousness or sheer ignorance. The average price of a new house in Hackney is £73,500. To buy a house at that price one needs a salary of at least £25,000 a year. Not a fraction of my constituents and certainly not a fraction of council tenants earn that sum. One eighth of council tenants earn more than £13,000 and there are no figures for the number who earn £25,000 and more. I suspect that it is tiny.

The Government refuse to accept that the private sector is not and cannot be a solution to the housing problems of inner-city areas such as Hackney. Neither now nor at any point in the future can the ordinary person living in the inner cities command the price of a private house. I say that even now when there is a slump in the housing market. When house prices climb again, they will be even further out of my constituents' reach. The private sector, which is the Government's panacea for almost everything, will not solve the housing problem in inner-city areas. There is no alternative to proper public sector provision. A Government who insist, contrary to all the facts and information, that somehow my constituents must pick themselves up and buy a private house show inhumanity that beggars description.

In recent years the Government have put considerable emphasis on the role of housing associations, but they have also put pressure on housing associations to raise rents. There will come a point when housing associations will have to set rents at a level such that they can repay the loans that they have incurred to build properties, but which my constituents cannot afford.

More crucially for my constituents, the Government, through the Housing Corporation, are putting pressure on housing associations to provide value for money, which for the Government means getting units built as cheaply as possible. That sounds reasonable in principle, but it is impossible for housing associations seeking to build in inner London to offer the corporation value for money compared with developers building on the south coast, in the north, in Scotland and in other areas where the price of land is not so high.

The Government then tell the London housing associations, "If you cannot afford to build in inner London, build outside London and take the inner London tenants with you." That sounds all right, but my constituents who have been born and bred in Hackney and whose families and jobs are in the locality do not want to move outside Hackney simply because it is cheaper to build elsewhere.

I often wonder whether Ministers talk to people who work for, for example, London Transport and the hospitals. Despite the recession, there is still a shortage of labour for employers such as British Rail and London Transport. London workers must live near London jobs. The Government's criminal neglect of public housing and the Housing Corporation's insistence on value for money are making it more difficult for housing associations and local authorities that want to build London housing for London workers to get on with the job.

I have tried to explain how ludicrous it is to expect the ordinary folk of inner London to look to the private sector for housing. We in Hackney have a larger proportion of council housing than probably any borough in the country. We have 41,000 tenants, 8,000 people on the waiting list and 3,000 homeless. The Minister and others may wonder what problems council tenants can have in relation to housing. Our estates in Hackney are crumbling around us and the council is not receiving nearly enough money for repair and renewal. We have thousands of pre-1909 houses on which millions of pounds must be

spent to repair and convert them into flats for occupation. The council does not have that money and the Government have no itention of providing it.

We have many thousands of pre-war flats. The Minister would not dream of living in them and he would be shocked if his relatives had to live in them. They have substandard room sizes, many are without central heating, there are no lifts, they are without fitted bathrooms, they have poor insulation, there are archaic refuse disposal systems and there are walkways which cause all sorts of public order dangers. We need hundreds of millions of pounds to bring our pre-war estates up to scratch.

I live in my constituency and walk through it every day. One has to see the estates crumbling away to appreciate the scale of the problem. Increasingly, because of the right to buy, the better quality council housing is being sold off and my constituents are being left with a ghetto of housing in which no hon. Member would wish to see any of his relatives forced to live.

In addition to the pre-1909 houses and pre-war estates, we have problems with what, on the face of it, would appear to be more acceptable housing. I refer to the newer system-built housing created in the 1960s and 1970s. The Minister may be aware of the enormous asbestos problems that occur with that type of housing, because asbestos was used for insultion. It will cost millions of pounds to remove that asbestos properly.

That type of property suffers from terrible systemic infestation. I am not sure whether the Minister has children, but how would he feel, on waking in the morning, to find ants and cockroaches crawling over his children in bed? That is the type of problem from which we suffer in many estates in Hackney because the system-built estates have heating ducts that run right through the blocks of flats and become infested with cockroaches and ants. As soon as one flat is fumigated the pests get into another, and even if the entire estate is fumigated they soon return. In this day and age, why should decent families have to go to sleep knowing that cockroaches are crawling over their kitchens and their children?

System-built flats also have problems with window renewal and with roofs. It costs money to make them fit to live in, but the Government resolutely refuse to accept the need for that money. Therefore, even the 41,000 people whom the council is able to house are, by and large, living in housing which is in an increasing state of disrepair and which is crumbling around them. The council does not have the money that it needs to repair that housing.

Those 41,000 people may live in appalling, infested and overcrowded housing, but at least it is housing. What cheer can I give to the people on the waiting list who may have amassed hundreds of points? Last year—as in previous years—Hackney built hardly any new homes. The Government must consider that issue, because the hopes of the people on the waiting list of being housed rests on the council's capacity to build new homes.

I want to make a point that is not party political because all councils would say the same. When will the Government allow councils to spend all the money that they make from council house sales on their capital and revenue programmes? At the moment, councils are allowed to spend only a quarter of the money that they make from such sales. If they were allowed to spend it all, perhaps Hackney might be able to start building houses again.

There are more than 8,000 people on the waiting list in Hackney. I have to say to them that because of our shrinking housing stock, the fact that the council does not have the money to build new property and the fact that we are losing property through the right to buy, the prospect of their being rehoused this side of the churchyard is nil. That is an awful thing to have to say. It makes me feel hopeless and helpless and reduces my constituents to tears. What Government could know that that situation exists, but refuse to do anything about it?

There was some progress in the treatment of the homeless in the inner city. For many years, boroughs such as Hackney had to put the homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It was hopelessly expensive and many operators ripped off local authorities and made millions of pounds out of people's misery. The conditions were often appalling—one family with perhaps two or three children had to live in one room. Families were forced to leave their rooms during the day and women with children had to walk the streets because they were not allowed to go back.

There were also problems with fire regulations in bed-and-breakfast hostels. There was at least one fire in a hostel in Bayswater in which people died because the person operating the hostel did not follow the proper fire regulations. The hostels provided accommodation that was overcrowded and squalid and which presented fire risks. Meanwhile, the landlords were making millions of pounds.

Councils such as Hackney have gone some way to taking homeless people out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation by going in for private sector leasing. The advantage of leasing from private landlords was that the council could offer halfway decent conditions. The scheme should have pleased the Government because it also saved money. However, the Government's response to the council's efforts to devise ways of housing homeless people and to stop ruthless hostel owners from making a fortune was to block the initiative. They tried to remove the subsidy for private sector leasing.

The Government have partially backed down in response to pressure from local authorities and they will allow local authorities to renew the leases. However, they should fully restore the scheme because if one child in Hackney dies in a fire in a ramshackle bed-and-breakfast hostel when he could have been in decent accommodation leased from the private sector, it will be the Government's responsibility.

How dare the Government try to force the homeless back into bed-and-breakfast hostels? I urge them to reconsider the scheme and to return a full subsidy to it. It is much more cost-effective than any bed-and-breakfast accommodation and it guarantees the homeless decent conditions. Whatever the Government might think, the homeless are not criminals and they are just as entitled to decent housing conditions as anyone else.

I have tried to outline the crisis posed by the housing problems in Hackney. I have tried to explain that the private sector is not the answer, no matter how much the Government try to delude themselves. Council tenants in Hackney face problems because of the quality of the housing stock, while those on the waiting list face difficulties because no rebuilding is taking place. I have already outlined the problems faced by the homeless. The Government, however, will turn round and talk about the way in which Hackney manages its housing.

[Ms. Diane Abbott]

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and I do not pretend that Hackney's housing management could not be improved. I have just come from a meeting with the director of housing in Hackney where we discussed the problems and the steps that he is taking to try to deal with them. He is the new director of housing and I assure the House that he has the energy and commitment to right some of the wrongs which I found impressive.

I admit that Hackney has the highest number of voids in the country, but, for better or worse, all those voids are not unoccupied. We have more than 4,000 voids, but 1,300 are squats and another 1,000 are occupied by those with short-life tenancies.

Hackney has a problem with rent arrears, but it is attempting to reduce those arrears. This year Hackney has achieved a 95 per cent. collection rate. I accept that that collection does not relate to rent arrears that have accumulated in the past, but the officers and councillors of Hackney are aware of the problem and are in the process of dealing with it.

The problems associated with housing management in Hackney, however, do not excuse the Government's wilful refusal to accept that inner cities have particular housing problems and their insistence on gimmicks rather than on making money available.

I do not want to be party political or argumentative, but let us consider the Government's housing action trust scheme. That was supposed to be the answer to the problems on housing estates that I have described. The HAT scheme collapsed because inner-city council tenants were not interested. The Government could not get a single estate in London that was prepared to get involved in a HAT. Tenants do not want private-sector landlords for the sake of it, they want decent quality housing. The problem does not rest with the council; ultimately it rests with the Government.

A society that can mobilise thousands of millions of pounds to spend on the Gulf war, but cannot mobilise the money to give my people a decent standard of housing, must have something wrong with it. I believe that the Government wilfully refuse to accept the serverity of the housing problems in Hackney and other areas. The Government are callous because they are not making resources available.

It will not do simply to engage in party-political abuse of the local authority. The problems faced by public housing in the inner city are systemic and deep-rooted. Those problems are causing misery to thousands of people every day. They cause more misery to more people in Hackney than almost any other issue. They cause me more thought and worry than almost any other issue. Even if every housing management problem in Hackney was ironed out today that would not detract from the Government's duty to provide the money and accept their responsibilities for housing all their people in decent conditions.

I am here to speak out for my council tenants in Hackney. The Government have done U-turns on many things and I beg them do one in their attitude to public-sector housing. They should launch a new initiative with real money, a real commitment and a real understanding of the problems—the people of Hackney deserve no less.

2.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) on securing the debate. I am relieved that it will be a debate, although I have only a few minutes in which to reply.

I hope that the Government will not do a U-turn, as the hon. Lady suggests, because her constituents would be among the first to suffer if the increased investment in housing were stopped. I promise the hon. Lady that I will not offer the platitudes that she fears. I do not wish the debate to be sour, because I recognise that Hackeny is making renewed efforts with its housing policy, which has gone astray in the past few years, as she will admit. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is also present. I assure both hon. Members that my reply will not be a handbagging exercise in any sense.

The Government recognise fully that they have the ultimate responsibility for housing people in this country. To that end, as an inner-cities Minister, since Christmas I have visited the sort of housing estates with which the hon. Lady is familiar, in Dundee, Glasgow, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Birmingham, Barnsley, Bristol, Plymouth, Southwark, Greenwich and Tower Hamlets. Given the opportunity, I would not mind visiting Hackney. The Government are determined to tackle housing problems in partnership with local authorities. It sometimes has been difficult to act in partnership with local authorities. I shall refer later to the problems that local government officials working in the housing departments have had for many years.

Hackney has had to deal with homelessness and general housing problems but, at the same time, it has 1,680 empty homes and 1,300 occupied by squatters. It is not easy to reconcile that problem with constituents who bring their homelessness problems to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington. I often see such a phenomenon when I travel around the country speaking to housing officers.

The hon. Lady criticised much of the Government's housing policy. We are trying to liberate people from monolithic, unimaginative, inhuman solutions to housing problems. Solutions were often tried and introduced with good intentions, but the problems were often compounded by the appalling results. The hon. Lady will be familiar with the huge, Stalinist concrete people's palaces of housing estates with which this country is littered. The problem of insect infestation is rooted in the design of those estates, and it is tragic that estates which were built with such imagination in the past 20 years or so—in the years since the hon. Lady attended a good school in the leafy suburb not 100 yards from the school at which I taught in Harrow—are now being torn down.

Ms. Abbott: The Minister talks about Stalinist estates. I was in east Berlin last year. If my constituents could live in the estates that I saw there—presumably built under Stalin—they would be grateful and happy.

Mr. Key: I have not seen estates in east Berlin, but I have seen them in Moscow and I assure the hon. Lady that, given the choice, I should rather live in Hackney than in Moscow.

In place of the old solutions, we have sought to offer tenants greater choice, more direct involvement in management and a choice of alternative landlords. We have also tried to increase public sector resources and have done so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that gross provision for Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1991-92 would be £1·5 billion, rising to more than £2 billion in 1993-94. That is a 65 per cent. increase over the current year. In the past 11 years we have enabled local authorities to spend approximately £36 billion on housing capital works. In that time, Hackney has been able to spend £475 million on housing. London receives an increasing proportion of that larger programme. The Hackney housing investment programme allocation for 1991-92 is £32·8 million, an increase of 14·8 per cent. on the previous year and the second highest HIP allocation in London.

The purpose of estate action programmes is to improve the quality of life of people on problem estates. We recognise that there are enormous social problems associated with difficult housing estates, but we are trying to bring together action for cities initiatives and estate action initiatives to include management, employment and enterprise initiatives and, above all, the involvement of tenants.

I wish that Hackney would encourage more sales of housing, which would help to generate new funds. I take the hon. Lady's point about 25 per cent. of receipts being able to be used on new housing provision, but Hackney's record on the right to buy is pretty terrible. I am glad that the council is putting up rents, which were unrealistically low for far too long, and low rents have never been a solution to such problems.

In the few minutes remaining, I wish to be positive about the reorganisation of the housing directorate in Hackney. From travelling the country and seeing housing problems, which I acknowledge exist, I have learnt that the staff of housing departments often do not have the necessary training or motivation. They therefore lose their sense of professionalism, recruitment is difficult and retention is poor. I want far better management of housing. The biggest single problem is not the lack of housing, but poor management. I hope that Hackney will address seriously the problems of management, and that it will ensure that staff are properly trained and motivated under the new director, as that will help the hon. Lady's constituents.

We have come a long way in policy and decision-making, and in management. What we now need is the best use of what we have. We must ensure that flats do not stand empty, and that rents are collected so that the money can be spent on services. As the hon. Lady will recognise, the refuse which accumulates in corners on so many estates must be collected. We need to ensure that the management on the estates is sufficiently good that repairs are done quickly. Above all, as I am sure the hon. Lady will agree, Hackney must ensure that tenants are not only chatted to but listened to. The area housing managers on the estates have a real job to do. It should not be a question merely of picking up notes from tenants and passing them back to someone at the town hall. We must improve the housing management system.

It is my duty and privilege to travel the country listening to local authorities and housing departments, and seeing for myself the problems that undoubtedly exist. I hope to find time to visit Hackney in the near future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 25 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

1. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the amount of carbon dioxide that would be emitted by fossil fuel power stations equivalent to existing nuclear capacity.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): Britain would emit around 15·5 million tonnes more carbon if the electricity currently provided by existing nuclear power stations were to be generated by coal, increasing total United Kingdom emissions by nearly 10 per cent. The environmental benefits of nuclear power in this context are recognised in a joint declaration on nuclear co-operation, which I am issuing today with my counterparts in France, Germany and Belgium. I am placing copies of the declaration in the Library.

Mr. Squire: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer about co-operation. However, does not he find it astonishing, not merely on common-sense grounds, but on environmental grounds, that the Labour party is pledged to phase out nuclear power? Does he agree that that is idiotic and can lead only to environmental damage and a reduction of our present open choice of fuel?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The declaration of the four Governments agrees that nuclear power can make a significant contribution to the solution of environmental problems associated with fossil-fuel power generation, such as global warming and acid rain. When we review nuclear power in 1994, it will be important to take such considerations into account.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

3. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the home energy efficiency scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): During the first two months some 16,000 direct applications for grant were received by the administering agency. In a full year, £26 million will be available under the scheme for assistance to low-income households.

Mr. French: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellent progress that the scheme is making and especially on the way in which it encourages voluntary groups to assist elderly people. However, will he try to ensure that the scheme is publicised more widely among the general public, because, although small, it is a very good illustration of the way in which Conservative policies ensure that talking about caring for the elderly and about energy conservation are translated into positive action?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Initial interest in the scheme has been high, suggesting that the publicity associated with its launch in January achieved the desired effect. It would be helpful, however, if hon. Members of all parties would help to publicise the scheme locally and would point out to low-income households and groups that substantial grants are available to help with better insulation and to provide good draughtproofing. The scheme also includes energy efficiency advice.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I, too, welcome the scheme. However, I deduce from the Minister's answer that it is cash-limited. I agree that we should all join in publicising the scheme, but does he accept that, if it is cash-limited, not all legitimate applications will be granted? If the scheme is really to be a success, would not it be better for it not to be cash-limited?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The sum allocated to the scheme is generous. I can confirm that there is no danger of the scheme running out of cash in the near or foreseeable future.

Mr. Morgan: I welcome the question of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), which has enabled both him and me to point out to the Minister the Government's hypocrisy in claiming that they are committed to the scheme. Their advertising budget has been spent almost entirely on the privatisation of the electricity distribution and generating companies when it should have been spent on a scheme such as this. Given the sky-rocketing increase in domestic electricity prices this coming year and in the past two years, is not the best investment that any family can make insulation to combat high electricity prices? But insulation is something which the Government have completely neglected.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I reject utterly the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The home energy efficiency scheme has been well publicised and the administering agency in Newcastle has not asked us to provide further advertising or expenditure to promote the scheme as yet. However, we shall monitor the position in the light of further developments.

Coal Imports

4. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet the chairmen of National Power and PowerGen to discuss coal imports.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairmen of both companies from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Barron: Is the Secretary of State likely to talk about coal imports? It was reported in the press earlier this year that the chairmen of the new generators had said that they wanted to import up to 50 per cent. of the coal that they currently receive from British Coal. Given the devastating effect that that would have in two years when the current

contract with British Coal runs out, does he have immediate plans to start talking about long-term contracts for an industry which is vital to the nation?

Mr. Wakeham: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not give credit to British Coal for obtaining long-term contracts for the first time. The three-year contracts are longer ones than it has ever had before.

The choice of fuel is a commercial matter for the generators. Privatisation opened up the prospect of greater diversification of fuel sourcing. Both National Power and PowerGen have stated that they intend to take advantage of the opportunity. However, I expect British Coal to remain a major supplier to National Power and PowerGen in the years to come, especially if British Coal can maintain its good record of efficiency improvements.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the recent policy statement from the Labour party on opencast mining threatens the Nottinghamshire miners' jobs and 13 of the 17 collieries which require low-chlorine coal to blend with their products before the power generating companies will buy? Is not that another sign of the Labour party's lukewarm stance on the extension of the Humber ports, which would enable British collieries to import the coal that they need to operate?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend, with his deep knowledge of the coal industry, makes a good point.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman has not read the document.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government favour a successful opencast sector. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have read the document, which Opposition Members have not. If the Opposition set an annual limit on opencast coal output, British Coal's viability would be reduced and job losses would result, in both the opencast sector and deep mines, where opencast output is relied upon for blending.

Mr. Hood: What is the Secretary of State doing about coal dumping in the EC? Is he aware that countries such as America and China are dumping coal at well below the price of production? British Coal has made representations to the Commission, but as yet has had no positive response. I met Sir Leon Brittan in Brussels a fortnight ago and raised the matter with him. He took a Pontius Pilate attitude and said that it had nothing to do with him. I find that strange because he is the Commissioner for competition. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he does not intend to play Pontius Pilate with regard to coal dumping in the EC? Does he accept that the British coal industry produces coal more cheaply than any other country in Europe? Will he fight the case for British coal in the EC?

Mr. Wakeham: Of course, I should be concerned about any coal dumping, but it is for the European Commission to decide whether to investigate complaints of this nature. There is no evidence of subsidised imports from the main coal-exporting economies. The heavily subsidised exports from the German coal industry account for only about 2 per cent. of coal imports.

Mr. John Marshall: As the world price of coal is somewhat lower than the price charged by British Coal, would not increased coal imports lead to lower electricity prices, which would benefit consumers such as pensioners and benefit energy-intensive industry and employment therein?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right. If we protected coal from overseas competition, industry would have to pay extra for its electricity and would be less competitive in the world market. That is where real damage to jobs and the balance of payments would occur. But provided that British Coal is competitive, National Power and PowerGen expect it to remain a significant supplier. That will be apparent when the coal contracts are signed.

Offshore Installations

5. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met representatives of offshore trade unions to discuss safety on offshore installations.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of the Trades Union Congress, together with representatives of a number of trade unions, on 12 February 1991.

Mr. Doran: The Minister will be aware how seriously trade unions take the question of safety, but is he aware that the Scottish Trades Union Congress, with support from offshore unions, has established a training course for health and safety representatives? Will he encourage oil companies and other offshore employers to use the facilities offered by that course? We await the ministerial announcement on the transfer of responsibility from the Department of Energy to the Health and Safety Executive and wonder whether the Minister can give us a progress report.

Mr. Moynihan: I welcome any project that involves trade unions in improved training and I wish them well with the projects to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I understand that the Health and Safety Commission will formally consider a proposal regarding the transfer at a meeting tomorrow. I hope that an announcement will be forthcoming shortly thereafter regarding a possible transfer in April.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that every employee involved in the offshore oil industry should be involved in safety in every possible way? Will he also confirm that that has been enshrined in recent regulations?

Mr. Moynihan: I can confirm that. The safety committees are intended to allow for full and active involvement of the work force as an essential formulation for improvements in safety, irrespective of whether the work force is unionised or non-unionised.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Minister recall our recent debate on Piper Alpha and Lord Cullen's report during which many specific instances were given of people being elected to safety committees and then suddenly losing their jobs? As he promised to investigate allegations of victimisation—and some were made—has he checked them out? Will he confirm that it would be much better if there were proper trade union representatives to give their backing to safety?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman will recall that I promised on that occasion to take up any specific case. That promise remains on the table. I have received no details of specific cases, but I should be only too happy to take up an individual request and respond to it fully.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point, Lord Cullen also recommended measures along the lines suggested by the hon. Gentleman that safety representatives should be given protection against unfair dismissal. We agree with that conclusion and we shall implement it accordingly.

Colliery Closures

6. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many collieries were closed *(a)* between 1964 and 1970, *(b)* between 1970 and 1979, and *(c)* how many have been closed since 1979.

Mr. Wakeham: According to figures available from British Coal, between 1964 and 1970 there were 263 closures; between 1970 and 1979 there were 67 closures and since 1979 there have been 132 closures. Those figures do not include colliery mergers.

Mr. Hannam: I thank my right hon. Friend for those figures, which show that under successive Governments the coal industry has been streamlining itself in order to become more competitive. Does he agree that it is vital for British Coal's future that it continues to aim to achieve the right balance between size and productivity and will he continue to support those aims?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Since 1979, the Government have approved over £7 billion of new investment and made available grant aid of about £17 billion, including the provision of over £6 billion in deficiency grant under the Coal Industry Act 1990. I say with absolute confidence that no Government have ever given more assistance to the coal industry than this Government. We have cleaned up the balance sheet and given it long-term contracts. It has every opportunity to establish itself on a long-term viable basis with the privatised British generators.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Secretary of State agree that many of the collieries that have closed since 1979 did so following substantial and often recent investment about which the Government boasted and Conservative Members supported? Does the right hon. Gentleman also agree that many of the post-1979 closures have meant the locking away of at least a century's worth of Britain's coal reserves while Conservative Members and the Government welcome, and are enthusiastic about, coal imports?

Mr. Wakeham: No one could accuse me or any of my hon. Friends of not wishing British Coal to be a competitive and successful player in the coal business of Britain—and I expect British Coal to remain so. I would not say that every investment that British Coal has made in its history has necessarily been wise. I want wise and profitable investment because I believe in a long-term future for the coal industry. Only if British Coal makes wise and sensible investments will it be able to continue to improve productivity, as it has done so remarkably well in recent years.

New Housing

8. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what statutory provisions cover consultations between the gas industry and a developer prior to new house building developments.

Mr. Moynihan: There is no statutory requirement for consultation in the relevant gas or planning legislation.

Mr. Steen: As I understand it, the first that a gas company knows of a new housing development is when someone calls and asks to be connected. Does my hon. Friend agree that the right way to proceed is for the gas company to be consulted—just as the National Rivers Authority is consulted—before a new housing development takes place, so that the infrastructure can be in place before new housing is built?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in pursuing this matter, not least with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy on 28 January. It is common practice for developers to consult British Gas before proceeding with their proposals to ensure the adequacy of supply and transmission lines, but we do not believe that it is necessary to superimpose a rigid statutory requirement on the process. My hon. Friend referred to the National Rivers Authority. The requirement for developers to undertake prior consultation with the NRA in certain cases applies only to developments where water contamination problems may occur. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that there is no close analogy with gas.

Coal Industry Productivity

10. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the increase in labour productivity in the coal mining industry since 1983-84.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British Coal has increased productivity in its deep mines by more than 85 per cent. since 1983.

Mr. Knox: To what does my hon. Friend attribute British Coal's extraordinary good performance on productivity? How much does he expect productivity to rise in the next five years?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The existence of a Conservative Government has helped the process and British Coal's management and workers have worked together to put behind them the spectre of industrial strife and dislocation that gave the industry a bad name in the past. I cannot predict what will happen in the next five years, but if British Coal continues its impressive improvement in productivity, its future will be bright.

Mr. Lofthouse: How does the Minister think the miners, who have put such massive efforts into increased production, feel now that Mr. Baker, chairman of National Power, says that, whatever British Coal's results, he proposes to import 50 per cent. of his coal? If that comes about, it will add a further £750 million to the balance of payments deficit and put out of action millions of tonnes of our national energy resource. Does the Minister think that that is good practice and does he have no influence on Mr. Baker whatever?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It would not be in the long-term best interests of the mining industry or British industry generally to keep out imports and try to insulate this country from world trade. The future of the coal mining industry is in the hands of the workers and the management and I am sure that, if they can sustain the productivity improvements, the electricity generating stations will continue to buy substantial quantities of coal from British sources.

Oil Production

11. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total amount of oil produced from United Kingdom land and waters in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and what he anticipates will be the change in this level of production.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990 oil production from the United Kingdom continental shelf was 91·6 million tonnes. I expect that by the mid-1990s, output will be significantly higher.

Mr. Taylor: Does that remarkable total mean that Britain is still self-sufficient in oil—that we produce more oil than we consume? Can the Minister give us an estimate of how long he expects Britain's oil reserves to last?

Mr. Moynihan: On the latter point, I believe that those reserves will last well into the next century. On the first question, with the exception of low production in the second quarter, due primarily to safety-related platform shutdowns, oil trade for 1991 is expected to show a significant surplus. I believe that that surplus will continue.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Although I welcome the increase in production, has the Minister taken steps to ensure that orders for the modules, jackets and platforms are allocated to British companies? Is he aware that recently two major contracts went to Norway? I represent a constituency which depends greatly on the offshore fabrication yards and I should welcome a clear statement from the Government on their intentions in that respect.

Mr. Moynihan: Only last week I visited Highland Fabricators and McDermotts and I believe that the outstanding contribution that the workers in those yards make to high-quality fabrication will ensure that they have an important role in the future.

There is additional competition coming from mainland Europe, not least because many of the yards are working at capacity with a high level of activity in the market. I assure the hon. Lady that last year, on the most recent figures published, 98 per cent. of orders on the United Kingdom continental shelf for the specific items to which she referred were placed with United Kingdom companies.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend accept that the price of oil will justify in the foreseeable future the exploration and drilling in the deeper waters west of the Shetlands?

Mr. Moynihan: We are extremely pleased with the response to the frontier round, the first of its type, which covers the area to which my hon. Friend referred. I am confident that the interest shown—there have been 13 applications, involving 53 companies—is a reflection of the buoyant prospects that the frontier round presents to the oil and gas sector.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister translate the expected quantities of oil into oil revenue? Does he accept that many of us believe that the most astonishing feature of the past decade and more has been that the vast revenues to the Government from oil production in the North sea have not been matched by industrial regeneration in many parts of Scotland and the United Kingdom? Will he accept it from me that under the next Labour Government the income from oil will be spent on regenerating the British economy and not squandered as it has been in the past decade?

Mr. Moynihan: I totally reject the hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks. Oil revenues undoubtedly have played an important part in industrial regeneration.

The hon. Gentleman will know full well that it is impossible to predict prices for one month, let alone throughout the 1990s. We can, however, create a stable fiscal and regulatory framework that enables companies that work in the North sea to exploit our resources, through the licensing round, given the available opportunities. I am confident that that will lead to growth in an already buoyant sector.

Coal Industry Manpower

12. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has received regarding contraction of manpower in the coal industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Manpower levels within the coal industry are a matter for British Coal. The key factor will be the extent to which the industry can maintain a profitable share of the energy market.

Mr. Eadie: But surely, as has transpired during this Question Time, it is absurd that at the same time as miners are creating record levels of coal production, Mr. Baker has announced that, when the next contracts are agreed, National Power wants to import 50 per cent. of its generating capacity. Does the Minister agree that that policy will mean that there will be more pit closures and thousands of miners will be flung on the scrap heap? Is his answer to the House that all that the Government can do is appoint a new chairman for British Coal at a salary of £250,000 and depend on the privatisation of the coal industry to solve its problems?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We could not isolate ourselves from the world energy market, even if we were allowed to by the rules of GATT and other international treaty obligations. To keep open uneconomic pits would not provide long-term job security for mineworkers. In recent years there have been a number of job losses, but it is to the credit of the industry that they have been achieved without a single compulsory redundancy. Every mine worker wishing to remain in the industry has been offered alternative employment.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister may believe that this is British Coal's responsibility, but is he aware that a good number of mine workers who have been made redundant because of pit closures are still trying to obtain employment? Men have been thrown out of work because of pit closures, but the Government are idly standing by and doing nothing to offer alternative employment. Is that not the Government's responsibility?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government have not been idly standing by. We support British Coal Enterprise, which has been extremely successful in promoting and finding alternative employment in the areas hit by colliery closures.

Independent Generators

13. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the amount of electricity likely to be generated by independent generators by 1995.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Twenty major independent generating schemes have come forward for approval. The eventual total capacity will depend on planning decisions and on the commercial decisions taken by the companies concerned.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful response. Clearly, independent generators are expressing interest in sites in urban areas, such as Rugby in my constituency. Will my hon. Friend suggest to developers that they go to derelict areas rather than green-field sites? Do the planning regulations have sufficient teeth to protect the environment?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend has written to the Department about a planning application in his constituency. I cannot comment on that, save to say that the planning conditions and requirements are as strict as ever and if a local authority objects to a proposed generating site, a public inquiry will be held.

Dr. Reid: Does the Minister share my hope that when approaching independent generators with advice, the Government will do so on the basis of more information and less stupidity than they have shown in the privatisation of the electricity industry? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm from his experience that the sulphur content of Scottish coal used in Scottish generation stations is much lower than that of coal in the rest of the United Kingdom? Will he therefore comment on the extraordinary report in this morning's newspapers that the Scottish electricity industry has been asked to bear the £300 million to £400 million costs of flue gas desulphurisation equipment to extract sulphur from coal with the lowest sulphur content in the United Kingdom? Would not that money be better spent extracting sulphur from coal with the highest sulphur content?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have a programme to retrofit 8 GW of capacity of coal-powered stations in the rest of the United Kingdom to meet our international obligations to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions.

Mr. Rost: Is my hon. Friend aware that many new power generation schemes are seriously at risk because of British Gas's overnight increase in gas prices of 35 per cent? If my hon. Friend wants genuine competition in the electricity market as against a duopoly, will he ensure that there is proper competition in the gas market by encouraging the oil industry to market gas independently of British Gas?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Gas prices are a matter for discussion between the independent regulator and the firms concerned. I confirm that it is only a short-term problem and in the longer term gas reserves in the North sea and around our coastline will remain high.

BNFL

16. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on future prospects for BNFL.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British Nuclear Fuels plc is a profitable and experienced supplier of nuclear fuel cycle services both at home and abroad. The company has a strong order book including business worth some £6,000 million for the first 10 years of operation of its thermal oxide reprocessing plant.

Mr. Butler: Are not BNFL's exports to countries such as Germany a sound indicator of a secure future for the company?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is to the great credit of BNFL that it has not only secured the first 10 years of operation of that plant, but is on its way to securing the profitability of its second decade.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Minister aware that my reply to the *Daily Star* questionnaire on the future of Sellafield was too ribald, rude and vulgar to be repeated in Parliament? What did the Government say to the *Daily Star*?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On the information that I have, I believe that the *Daily Star* article was seriously misleading. I can well believe that the hon. Gentleman's reply was robust as he has been a staunch supporter of the responsible use of civil nuclear power in the past and doubtless will be in the future.

Combined Cycle Gas Technology

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has discussed with the Director-General of Ofgas the sale of gas for generation of electricity using combined cycle gas technology.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Pike: When the Secretary of State met Ofgas, did he discuss the maximum proportion of electricity that should be generated by PowerGen and National Power? If not, does it mean that the Government have no policy on the best use of our energy resources?

Mr. Wakeham: Government policy is to have diverse sources of supply so that, so far as possible, we can move to a point at which they all pay their proper economic cost. Generators can then decide which fuel to use in the best interests of their business.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: British Gas is increasing its prices because it says that it is losing £250 million due to bad weather. It seems to think that it can insist on doing that when it loses money due to problems of bad weather, good weather or lack of industry. If private industry could have things so easy, it could earn riches beyond the dreams of the Pharoahs. Can we not stop this kind of nonsense in nationalised industries which have become private cornucopias?

Mr. Wakeham: Since becoming privatised, British Gas has a good record of keeping consumer prices down. The role of Ofgas is to be welcomed. There is a supply problem in terms of gas for the generation of electricity, and the company could have become over-committed on previously scheduled prices. I understand that the problem

relates to 1993-94. I welcome the efforts being made by British Gas and Ofgas to find a solution which offers a positive future for independent gas-fired generation. That is the right way forward and I am hopeful that a solution will be found.

Mr. Barron: The 35 per cent. increase in British Gas prices to industrial generators has implications for the long-term supply of gas to domestic users and raises a number of questions. Does the Secretary of State think that it is right for the Government to talk about the need for a diversity of supply and that the matter should be left to the market? We want to know how domestic consumers will be provided with gas in the not-too-distant future if the burning of gas for electricity generation takes off in the way that the right hon. Gentleman wishes.

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, not much gas will be burnt at prices that are 35 per cent. higher than before. We shall have to see how negotiations proceed. British Gas is not the only source of power station gas. Some projects have already obtained supplies direct from producers, and I hope that others will also do so.

Coal Imports

18. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet the chairmen of National Power and PowerGen to discuss coal imports.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

Mr. Lofthouse: Has the chairman of British Coal ever expressed concern about the strong rumours that the retrofit flue gas desulphurisation plants at Ferrybridge may be transferred to the Isle of Grain? That could have a major effect on the Yorkshire coalfield. Are those rumours true?

Mr. Wakeham: The position about the retrofits was clearly set out in the prospectus for the sale of the shares in the generating companies. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has authority in these matters and I do not envisage any changes to what was set out in the prospectus.

Combined Heat and Power

19. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many combined heat and power schemes are in operation throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department's current estimate is that there are more than 500 sites in the United Kingdom using combined heat and power technology.

Mr. Page: Is it not true that combined heat and power is more efficient and produces less carbon dioxide, which is important in terms of minimising the greenhouse effect? What are the Government doing to ensure that within their own Departments, including the Ministry of Defence, such energy-saving methods are introduced for the benefit of the whole country?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right to say that the combined use of heat and power at appropriate sites is a good way to reduce the output of greenhouse gases. My Energy Efficiency Office operates a vigorous programme to educate and inform potential users about that technology.

Oil Industry (Safety)

20. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the amount spent on safety measures by the oil industry since 6 July 1988.

Mr. Moynihan: We do not have comprehensive estimates of oil industry expenditure on safety measures. I understand, however, that since 6 July 1988 the industry has spent or committed approximately £900 million on fitting pipeline emergency shutdown valves and sub-sea isolation systems.

Mr. Tredinnick: Given the British oil industry's safety experience, what steps has my hon. Friend's Department taken to help overcome the Gulf oil crisis? Are British companies playing their part in sending equipment and resources to assist in that devasting oil disaster?

Mr. Moynihan: Yes, we have offered support and our offer has been taken up and is being co-ordinated by my colleagues in the Department of the Environment.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Visits

24. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last visited the county Palatine.

29. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what visits he has made to the county of Lancashire in the last three months.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Chris Patten): I have made five visits to Lancashire in the past three months. My last visit was two days ago.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is it true, as Frank Johnson claimed in yesterday's *Sunday Telegraph*, that my right hon. Friend would

"prefer to pop down to the social market rather than Romford Market"?

Are not Essex man and Essex woman just as keen as Lancastrians on greater choice in housing and education? Will my right hon. Friend take time off from his duties in the north-west to visit my constituency and hear the views of my constituents for himself?

Mr. Patten: I certainly did not agree with everything that Frank Johnson wrote. He suggested, for example, that my idea of Essex man is probably Constable. However, my hon. Friend is entirely right to point out that we have extended the choice available to parents, children, patients, and council house tenants over the past few years. We have plenty more still to do in extending choice, but I fear that all our proposals will be resisted by Labour.

Mr. Pike: The right hon. Gentleman's visit to Ribble Valley and to Southport last week will have caused him to rethink the answer that he gave me on 11 February. Does he now acknowledge the serious concern that exists about many of the Government's policies? When shall we see further changes and U-turns in a vain attempt to defend themselves?

Mr. Patten: I have little doubt that we shall win back Ribble Valley at the next election. Apparently, those who live in Ribble Valley do not have much doubt about that, either. We shall win the next election, whenever it comes, on our policies. I suspect that a large number of Liberal Democrat Members also believe that we shall win the next election.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I was delighted to hear from my right hon. Friend's office this morning that he is to visit us in Bilsborrow in October, as he promised several years ago. Is he aware that my constituents are delighted at today's trade figures, which are the best since February 1987 and will increase Britain's prosperity still further?

Mr. Patten: I have been looking forward to visiting my hon. Friend's constituency for many years. It promises to be the highlight of my autumn. My hon. Friend is right to point to the substantial improvement in the trade figures. It is yet a further indication of the sense and effectiveness of the Government's economic policy.

Official Duties

25. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much time he has spent in the past month on official business.

31. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what official duties he has carried out in the past month.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have spent up to a quarter of my time carrying out official duties in the past month. These include signing instruments authorising the appointment, transfer and removal of magistrates, placing a list of future high sheriffs before Her Majesty the Queen and carrying out day-to-day responsibilities as a Government Minister.

Mr. Winnick: That is all very interesting, but would it not be the wish of many Conservative Members that the right hon. Gentleman should spend more time on official business, considering the right mess that the Conservative party is in at present? I well understand and entirely appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's apparent wish for the election to be postponed as the smell of death is all over the Government.

Mr. Patten: We all know that a large number of Opposition Members spend their evenings, and certainly supper once a week, wondering what to do with the Leader of the Opposition after he has lost another general election, so that remark is pretty ripe coming from the hon. Gentleman. We shall spend the next months and perhaps even a year and a half continuing to govern the country extremely effectively and developing policies to implement during our next period in government.

Mr. Burns: During the carrying out of his official duties in the past month, has my right hon. Friend had time to ruminate? If so, will he confirm that the Government will not be bamboozled by the press into an early election simply to make a story for the media?

Mr. Patten *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are questions about the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Patten: I am not sure that I ruminate as much as I should, but I am sure that if I ruminated as my hon. Friend has suggested I would agree that it is unwise to be bandwaggoned by the media into taking any decisions, let alone decisions about the timing of the next general election. As I said earlier, however, whenever the election comes I am absolutely convinced that we shall win it and I believe that a number of Opposition Members also think that we shall win it.

Dr. Cunningham: When the Chancellor next goes to the north-west, will he find time to visit Barrow and talk to the people there about the disaster that will hit the town as a result of the projected redundancies at VSEL? Will he consider the repercussions that that will have throughout the engineering industry in the north-west, including many companies that operate in the Duchy? It is a devastating blow to an isolated community when our economy is sliding ever deeper into the second recession this decade. What hope, from the Budget or from any other aspect of Government policy, can the Chancellor offer the people in Barrow and further afield in the north-west who are to lose their jobs?

Mr. Patten: I will, of course, draw the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friends who will be concerned about job training and other measures that the Government will be anxious to implement in Barrow and elsewhere. Given the Labour party's policies on defence spending and procurement in the past few years, anyone with any job in engineering or the defence industries would have a great deal to fear in the albeit distant prospect of a Labour Government being elected. The hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well. We can look forward to a period of resumed economic growth, on the back of low inflation, provided that we stick to the policies on which we are currently set.

Property

26. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many properties for which he is responsible are mortgaged.

Mr. Chris Patten: None, Sir.

Mr. Cohen: Are not the Minister and his colleagues working a stroke here? Is that not what the odd 0·5 per cent. cut in interest rates amounts to when building societies do not reduce the mortgage rate? Presumably there will be a reduction just before the general election, but if by some horror the Conservative party were to remain in power, interest rates—including mortgage rates—would immediately go up again. Does the Minister agree that that would be to the disadvantage of every mortgage payer in the Duchy of Lancaster and throughout the country?

Mr. Patten: There is much in the hon. Gentleman's question with which I disagree. It will be in the interests of home owners in the future, as it has been in the past, to have a Conservative Government. Thanks to the fact that the country has had a Conservative Government for the past decade, there are more than 3 million additional home owners. All those who have purchased council houses will recognise that if the Labour party had been in power they would not have been able to do so. I am sure that all home owners are very pleased with the 2·5 per cent. reduction in

interest rates since we joined the exchange rate mechanism and look forward to seeing that reduction feed through to their mortgages.

Visits

27. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next intends to visit the Duchy.

30. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to visit the Duchy in the immediate future.

Mr. Chris Patten: I plan to visit Lancashire on 12, 22 and 23 April.

Mr. Shersby: When my right hon. Friend next visits the Duchy will he make a particular point of calling at Preston and at Fulwood, where I had the good fortune recently to spend a very interesting day calling on Conservative voters? Will he reassure people there that the crippling community charge imposed by Preston council and by Lancashire county council will be greatly abated by the introduction of the new measures announced last week by the Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)?

Mr. Patten: I am sure that the measures announced last week will be good for people in Preston, and also for people elsewhere in the county Palatine. Voters in Preston should take note of the number of Preston Labour councillors who have refused to pay their community charge but continue to draw their allowances.

Mr. Bowis: When my right hon. Friend visits the county Palatine he will see that the Government's resolute support for the measures in the prevention of terrorism Acts receive a widespread welcome there and that there is widespread puzzlement at the Labour party's opposition to that legislation and its desire to deny people protection.

Mr. Patten: It is a matter of genuine regret that the Labour party has recently proved so feeble in its resistance to terrorism. It has slipped away from the line that was pursued, for instance, by the noble Lord Mason when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Research Assistants

32. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many research assistants are currently employed in the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The total number of research assistants holding photo-identity passes for the House at 12 March 1991 was 465.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I suspect that there has been a significant reduction in the number of research assistants since the new limit was introduced. Is there any means of checking the quality of work of those assistants? Clearly, the Labour party's figures do not add up.

Mr. MacGregor: There has been a reduction in the number of research assistants, although the limit recommended by the Services Committee relates to photo-identity passes for all staff and not just for research assistants. When that limit was introduced, the number was over 600. It is now 465. Beyond what hon. Members do, there is no check, as such, on the quality of work of research assistants. In response to my hon. Friend's final point, I confirm that many questions could be asked about various aspects of Labour party policy.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the leader of the House aware that some of us are becoming rather fed up with the continued gratuitous attacks on people who do a good job of work? It is about time that we had more politics in this place instead of the commercial entertaining that is done by Conservative Members. The flummery of this place, with swords and all the other paraphernalia, is so outdated. The sooner that this is a working Parliament, the better it will be for the people of Britain.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not quite clear what the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question has to do with the original question. It seems that the hon. Gentleman, uncharacteristically, is being a little sensitive especially about the quality of some of the work that is going into Labour party policy, which was the point made by my hon. Friend the member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall).

Mr. Simon Hughes: As a serious proposition has been put forward by the London School of Economics for the use of county hall as a library for this House and the other place, and as the Chairman of the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee has canvassed with some support the idea of Members' accommodation being found in county hall—and bearing in mind that the consortium bidding for county hall has gone bust,—will the Leader of the House seriously consider using that building to accommodate research assistants, other support staff and even Members of this House and the other place?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that it would be right to continue with the completion, which is very near, of phase 1 of Bridge street, which will improve facilities for Members and their secretaries considerably, and then to move on to phase 2, which will again add considerably to facilities.

Stationery

33. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has any plans to change the glue on envelopes which are not of the self-seal variety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Greenway: I represent my secretary's misgivings about the glue on envelopes not of the self-seal variety. Will my right hon. Friend take some action to change the obnoxious glue currently used on envelopes to something decent such as peppermint or strawberry-flavoured glue?

Mr. MacGregor: I will ensure that my hon. Friend's complaint is drawn to the attention of the Serjeant at Arms, who can deal with such matters. In view of the question that my hon. Friend asked previously, I am not sure whether rice pudding-flavoured glue would be appropriate for envelopes.

Procedures of the House

34. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he is now in a position to announce the review of the hours and procedures of the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: With regard to procedures, I shall continue to look at the scope for improvement and to liaise with the Procedure Committee at its work. As for the hours the House sits, I am considering the variety of opinions that have been expressed to me.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House confirm that he has received many representations from all quarters, including some Members, about changing the hours and procedures of this place? Will he confirm also that no Member has asked him to include Sunday sittings? Does that mean that those Members who want to change the hours of work of people outside this place so that they work on Sundays are not altogether keen to work here —I use the word "work" loosely—in Parliament on Sundays? In other words, they wish to keep Sunday special for Parliament.

Mr. MacGregor: I can confirm that I have had a variety of opinions expressed to me about changing working hours. The difficulty is that they are often contradictory. I am considering what might be done in considering these matters. If we make any moves which go beyond the work that the Procedure Committee undertakes, it is important that they are made with some measure of agreement. I can confirm that no request has been made to have the House sitting on Sundays. The hon. Gentleman will know, however, that many Members do a great deal of work on Sundays.

Mr. Dykes: As the job of a Member of this place is definitely a full-time one now, apart from a small minority of thoroughly idle Members whose names he may be able to guess, does my right hon. Friend accept that, as well as making improvements which will modernise the hours and procedures of the House, it is essential to provide the mechanical and physical tools to enable Members to do their job more effectively? Does not that include the ability to make official telephone calls to other Community institutions?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that my hon. Friend is not suggesting that Members who have some outside interests are idle, as I can assure him that that is not so. Indeed, many of them work very long hours in this place. I am always seeking to improve facilities. I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the Services Committee has recently agreed that steps should be taken to ensure that very soon it will be possible to make telephone calls as he requests.

Dr. Cunningham: Does the Leader of the House recall the suggestion that he should commission a comparative study on the way in which Parliaments in other democratic countries work and place that study in the Library? What progress has been made on that?

Mr. MacGregor: It is one of the suggestions that may be worth pursuing in relation to looking at other aspects of the way in which the House works. As the hon. Gentleman knows, such comparative studies of other countries' legislature take a long time, and I have to bear that in mind. It is also relevant to bear in mind the different traditions and practices of other legislatures. However, I see the purpose of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Mesopotamia

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to set up a Select Committee to consider health problems in Mesopotamia.

Mr. MacGregor: No, Sir.

Mr. Dalyell: As waterborne diseases are silent assassins and millions of people with whom we are told that we have no quarrel have to drink water from a river awash with human faeces, and as a horrendous civil war has developed since my question was tabled, is it satisfactory that the House will not discuss those matters for at least another 21 days and has not done so, other than in private Members' or minority party time, since January?

Mr. MacGregor: That does not relate to the hon. Gentleman's question. As I have told the hon. Gentleman on other occasions, I do not believe that a Select Committee is an appropriate place to consider that issue. It is always open to departmental Select Committees to study aspects of problems germane to their specific subjects if they so wish, but any discussions must relate to the subject that concerns them.

On the situation in Mesopotamia, a multi-agency United Nations mission recently returned from Iraq, where it was assessing humanitarian needs. It has yet to report to the United Nations. The Government have already contributed a considerable sum to emergency relief supplies.

Parliamentary Medical Services

36. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what information he has on the on-site medical provision for members of other EC Parliaments including the European Parliament.

Mr. MacGregor: Meaningful information about medical facilities in the Parliaments of the European Community is not readily available.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend undertake a survey to gather such meaningful information to ensure that we are not the poor relation in that respect?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend has much interest in those matters, but I do not think that a survey would add greatly to the knowledge which led the Services Committee, the authorities of the House and qualified and professional medical opinion to conclude that a general practitioner service would be inappropriate for the House. All those bodies came to the conclusion that such a service could not operate in accordance with criteria set down by the family practitioner committee, would not operate in the best interests of Members and their relationship with their regular GPs, and would be detrimental to agreed emergency procedures. I assure my hon. Friend that a number of people have studied the matter with considerable care. Having studied it carefully myself, I believe that the right conclusion has been reached.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does the Leader of the House agree that the bulk of Parliament's work is carried on the backs

of a relatively small number of assiduous Members of Parliament who rightly complain about the lack of resources and facilities? Will he undertake a comparative study of the facilities available——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the question relate to medical facilities?

Mr. Banks: —medical facilities, secretarial facilities, research facilities and other facilities, to see how we compare with other Parliaments in Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that I am trying to improve facilities wherever possible. The building in Bridge street will soon be an important additional step. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assumption that only a small number of Members carry a heavy load in the House. The vast majority of Members work extremely long hours. Moreover, I do not see how the hon. Gentleman's question relates to on-site medical provision in other Parliaments.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who takes a different view from mine on the Gulf war, mentioned that the House will not be sitting for two weeks. I should like to seek your advice, Mr. Speaker, because there have been persistent reports that the Saddam Hussein regime is using napalm weapons against the forces fighting in the present civil war. That appears to be in clear breach of international conventions and United Nations resolutions on the Gulf. Would it be right and proper for the House to break up without a statement from the Foreign Secretary? Many of us believe that the allies should give a clear warning to the Saddam Hussein regime that, should such action persist, the allies will have to consider what action to take.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to advise the hon. Gentleman on tactics, but if he was here last Thursday he would have heard me say that subjects for the Adjournment debate should be in my office by 10 o'clock this evening. The subject that he mentioned seems an admirable one to raise if he is fortunate in the ballot.

BILL PRESENTED

Hospital Schools in London

Ms. Harriet Harman, supported by Ms. Joan Ruddock, Mr. Tom Cox, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. John Fraser, Ms. Diane Abbott and Mr. Clive Soley, presented a Bill to make arrangements for the education of children in hospitals in London: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 119.]

Special Constables

3.36 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision with respect to the conditions of service of special constables; and for connected purposes.

My Bill will amend the Special Constables Regulations 1965 and, if necessary, the Police Act 1964. I have been informed by Michael Hedges, the chief commandant of Norfolk special constabulary, that the current strength of specials in Norfolk is 280, out of an establishment figure of 411. That is an improvement on the 1980 figure, which was only 180. I should like to pay tribute to the special constables in Norfolk and the regular force, the Norfolk constabulary, with whom the specials have an excellent working relationship. I have been in touch with the Police Federation of England and Wales, and agree with it that the specials should not be a cheap alternative to a well equipped and professional regular police force. I would never support such an idea, and I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) in his place, listening to the introduction of this ten-minute Bill.

There has been an improvement nationally in recruitment of specials, which I expect to accelerate following the current Home Office poster campaign. We all see the posters with the teaser question,

"When does an optician ever keep an eye on football supporters?"

as we drive around our constituencies. It is a good campaign, and I hope it succeeds in its recruitment of special constables.

However, there is an overwhelming case for further recognition and help for the specials. There were 24,000 special constables in 1974, but now there are only 15,500. That case has been powerfully made in the House by my hon. Friend the present Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Moynihan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), both of whom I am pleased to see in their places. They made their arguments effectively in Adjournment debates in 1986 and 1990. There is not time for me to repeat all their arguments in my short speech this afternoon.

If enacted, my Bill will provide the Home Secretary, the police authorities and chief constables with the necessary powers to achieve the following objectives quickly. First, it will speed up recruitment procedures for our special constables. Secondly, it will provide better equipment and protection for specials, who should be entitled to the best standards at present available to the regular police force. Thirdly, it will provide improved and extended training for special constables. The training programmes should be fully structured in future. Fourthly, we should aim for improved training of regular officers who are responsible for the supervision of special constables during their induction period and in their work. Fifthly, there should be fairer arrangements for sick pay and improved help for those injured in the course of their duty, on a par with that available to regular officers and members of the police forces generally and nationally.

There should also be improved allowances for special constables and the provision of an annual bounty. I am aware of the experimental scheme that is currently being applied by the Home Office to metropolitan specials, but a national bounty should be payable as soon as possible. It should be payable after a minimum service of, say, two years, and its value should increase with longer service. Also, it is very important that any bounty must be new ring-fenced money and should not come out of the present police authority budget. After all, the bounty system has worked well in the Territorial Army. I served in the Territorial Army for six years, and I see no reason why such a system should not work well for special constables as well. There is no evidence that a bounty would result in a loss of prestige or of the voluntary spirit.

The ideal of voluntary service is part of our national life. We see it also in the St. John Ambulance and the Red Cross. We in Parliament have a duty to provide positive incentives so that suitable recruits will volunteer for service in all ways, and particularly for the special constables.

The changes in the law and regulations that will secure those objectives are essential. In future, we shall need increasing numbers of special constables who are prepared to take more responsibility, become more involved in crime prevention, and be fully accountable to the public. I hope that we shall thereby slow down or reverse the growth of vigilantes, Guardian Angels and less reputable security firms. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth in his Adjournment debate last October.

Total annual spending on the police at the moment is £4·5 billion, but on special constables it is less than £1 million. The Bill is intended to put in place the necessary powers to increase the numbers, improve the quality and enhance the effectiveness of specials. All that is needed is the political will. After all, the history of special constables can be traced right back to the voluntary peace officers established by the Statute of Winchester in 1285. By allowing me to introduce the Bill, the House will demonstrate strong support for special constables in every part of the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Patrick Thompson, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Sir Geoffrey Finsberg, Mr. Christopher Hawkins, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr Roger King, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, Mr. James Pawsey Mr. David Porter, Mr. Ian Taylor, Mr. Neil Thorne, and Mr. Peter Viggers.

Special Constables

Mr. Patrick Thompson accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision with respect to the conditions of service of special constables; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 123.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [19 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax, otherwise than by virtue of goods or services supplied to one person being treated for the purposes of section 14(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 as supplied to another person;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant document: European Community document No. 4433/91 on the Annual Economic Report 1990-91.]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call Mr. Secretary Lilley, I should say that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate on the last day of the Budget debate. *[Interruption.]* They have indicated their wish to participate. That being so, I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock.

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a Budget for enterprise. It is a Budget which has rightly been welcomed by businesses throughout the country.

The president of the CBI has hailed it as

"a budget for soundly based recovery, for savings and for investment."

He went on:

"The Chancellor has listened to those who create the nation's wealth".

The president of the British Chambers of Commerce said that the Chancellor

"really listened to everything we had to say. Chambers are delighted at the practical measures of support to help business during a difficult time. This was the Budget for business we needed."

Even *The Guardian* applauded the Chancellor's

"cascade of measures to help industry big and small".

I welcome the Budget because the Chancellor targeted his measures to help small firms, to ease cash flow pressures on those hardest hit by the recession, and to strengthen the incentive to invest. Small firms will benefit particularly from the halving of the wait for bad debt relief, from the dramatic increase in the small firms profit limit, and from the 38 per cent. increase in VAT thresholds. I particularly pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's forceful advocacy in finally persuading the European Commission to permit that increase. It will take 150,000 firms out of VAT entirely, relieving them of the compliance burden as well as the cost of the tax.

It is always particularly difficult to use the tax system to ease the position of companies which may be making no profits this year and so paying no tax. I applaud my right hon. Friend's ingenuity in finding ways of doing that: 700,000 businesses will be allowed to pay their employee's PAYE quarterly, thus enabling them to keep the cash longer; firms will be able to carry back losses against profits in any of the past three years; and the corporation tax rate on last year's profits has been reduced retrospectively.

The objective of all our industrial reforms over the past 12 years has been to make Britain the most attractive place in Europe for industry to invest in. Even before the Budget, we had achieved that.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Many of the measures introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are advantageous to business. However, does the Secretary of State accept that, if we add up the benefit to businesses as a result of the various tax changes announced in the Budget, that is still not as much as the additional £1·6 billion that will be taken by local authorities in the forthcoming year in respect of non-domestic rates as a result of the 10·9 per cent. increase in the uniform business rate announced for the next financial year?

Mr. Lilley: The purpose of introducing the business rate and the assurance it gives was to guarantee that the business rate would not rise unpredictably and capriciously in Labour-held areas, but by an amount governed by the rate of inflation.

The clearest proof that we have provided the environment that makes Britain the most attractive area for investment in Europe is the fact that Britain is now the No. 1 choice for inward investment. We attract over four times as much investment from Japan as France does and more than six times as much Japanese investment as Germany. Forty per cent. of all American investment into the Common Market comes into Britain, and German companies put more of their foreign investment into Britain than into any other EC country. Those inward investments are not bribed by discriminatory subsidies; they come here because our overall business environment is attractive.

Moreover, not a single grant or scheme is made available to inward investors that is not just as readily available to indigenous firms. Everything that makes Britain an attractive place for foreign companies to invest in also makes it an attractive place for British companies to invest in.

The Opposition, and some of our competitors, believe that the best way to attract inward investment is by outbidding each other with subsidies, nursing firms with quangos, and offering special tax reliefs. A recent study by Strathclyde university shows that they are mistaken. The majority of foreign investors studied were not interested in higher subsidies. They were not looking for quangos. They were not even looking for cheap loans.

The most important single factor was lower taxation. A major reason that the United Kingdom has been such an attractive place to invest is that the tax burden on companies here is significantly lower than in our main

competitors. The sum of corporate and payroll taxes was 17·2 per cent. of national income in France, 10·5 per cent. in Germany—but only 8·9 per cent. in the United Kingdom. Our lead will be even greater as a result of this Budget.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Despite all the measures that the Secretary of State has publicised today, and despite all his boasts about inward investment, why is investment this year to fall by 9·75 per cent.?

Mr. Lilley: Investment is about 75 per cent. up on the bottom of the recession. It is slowing this year, and that is not surprising, because it usually does so in recessions. However, the hon. Gentleman always ignores the rise in investment that has already taken place.

Mr. Brown *rose*—

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman is not content with a 75 per cent. increase, nothing will make him content.

We can now claim the lowest rate of corporation tax, not just in Europe, but lower than the United States or any other major industrial country.

Mr. Brown: Will the Secretary of State simply explain why, if the record he is describing is so successful, business investment is to fall by 9·75 per cent. this year?

Mr. Lilley: I have just explained that business investment is falling from a record level in a short-term recession. The hon. Gentleman is obsessively short-termist; I shall return to that.

It is instructive to compare the Chancellor's Budget with the taxation changes that the Labour party proposed before the Budget. The Labour party offered nothing targeted to help small firms, to help cash flows or to reduce tax rates. Instead, it offered a proliferation of tax distortions. Some were vague—for example, an enhanced allowance for certain categories of plant and machinery. Unfortunately, nothing about that proposal was certain. The Labour party did not specify which categories of plant and machinery would benefit, who would decide which would benefit, by how much or for how long.

Other proposals are unworkable, for example that "genuinely innovative investments will be eligible for up to 100 per cent. write off".

Just imagine if the Inland Revenue had to determine for each and every investment—£100 billion-worth every year—which were "genuinely innovative" and which were not. It would be a nightmare. Far from encouraging investment, it would cause huge delays and damaging uncertainty to industry. Other proposals are demonstrably ineffective.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Does the Secretary of State recall that, for about eight years, plant and machinery were defined clearly, and that the system worked without any particular disadvantage to the Inland Revenue, which allocated capital allowances based on that definition?

Mr. Lilley: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but the Labour party's proposal was that certain categories of plant and machinery should be given different reliefs from others, without defining which those certain categories were. I noticed that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) had to lean across to the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to find out.

Mr. Gordon Brown: When?

Mr. Lilley: Just when I was making the point. Far from encouraging investment, the Labour party's proposal would cause huge delays and damaging uncertainty.

Almost every published study of tax credits for research and development shows that the costs far exceed the benefits, usually by a multiple of between two and five. Moreover, the apparent benefits often seem to be largely illusory.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although there are many excellent measures in the Budget and that we on the Conservative Benches are not concerned with the Opposition, who are likely to remain in opposition for some years to come, this should be the last Budget in which the motor industry is singled out to be clobbered? At present, £1·5 billion of extra taxation is levied from one of our greatest employers. If we believe in Rolls-Royce, Jaguar, Bentley and Range Rover, is it not time that we stopped clobbering the motor industry at every turn? Without it, a great deal of engineering would disappear. Let this be the last Budget in which we clobber the motor industry above all other industries.

Mr. Lilley: I do not accept that a tax on personal benefits in kind constitutes clobbering an industry. It is only right that people should pay tax on the benefits in kind that they receive.

The Labour party proposed a tax credit for research and development, but ignored the evidence that it has been ineffective in other countries where it has been applied, that the costs exceed the benefits, often fivefold, and that the benefits are often thought to be illusory, as all that happens is that accountants reclassify expenditures as research and development in order to gain the tax break.

If we had accepted the Labour party's pre-Budget proposals, we would have given accountants a field day. We would have made the life of the production manager more complex and less certain. Labour's Budget proposals would have produced a Budget for creative accountancy. By contrast, our approach of cutting tax rates and pruning reliefs reduces the reward and scope for accounting ingenuity. It also increases the incentive for profitable investment. That is why, following our tax reforms in 1984, the amount of business investment has increased by 50 per cent. Even more important, the quality of investment has improved as well.

All too often, it used to be the finance director who made the investment decisions, simply to reduce the tax charge. Now it is the production engineer and the marketing director who make the decisions, on genuine business grounds. I believe that it would be the height of folly to reverse the 1984 changes, and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took them further by again cutting tax rates and reducing reliefs.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) has just said, is the Secretary of State aware that there has just been an announcement that 1,800 more workers at Lucas Industries Ltd. will lose their jobs? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one characteristic of the Government's past 12 years in office has been that there are more and more building societies and estate agencies littered along every high street, but the factories

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

that used to be located behind them and which used to employ our workers in every town and city in Britain have now been closed? Does the Secretary of State accept that our manufacturing economy has been almost wiped out by the Government, and that the casino economy has flourished?

Mr. Lilley: Manufacturing output fell under the previous Labour Government, but it has risen under this Government. We still have not heard from the Opposition what priority they will attach to inflation; nor have we heard any credible strategy from them for defeating inflation.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has recently been talking about "credit management"—his latest euphemism for credit controls—as an alternative to high interest rates. He and his hon. Friends continue to peddle the notion that other countries in Europe somehow keep interest rates down by intervening in credit markets. The fact is, they do exactly the opposite. The special deposits and reserve ratios imposed by central banks are not designed to reduce interest rates; they are to keep commercial bank interest rates above the central bank discount rate.

I challenge the right hon. and learned Gentleman to name a single European country which uses credit controls to ration credit and keep interest rates below the market clearing level. He does not respond, because he cannot respond.

On this side of the House, we do not pretend that there is any soft option to curb inflation; nor do we deny the pain which high interest rates and weak demand cause. But as a nation we have two great failings: we tend to take a short-term view, and we tend to focus on gloom. Now we can indulge both failings simultaneously, and many people are wallowing in short-term gloom. As I said earlier, nobody is more obsessively short-termist or more indulgently gloomy than the hon. Member for Dumfermline, East. I am sure that we shall soon hear him say that the end is nigh.

But we ought to take a long-term view, both about the changes over the last decade and about the prospects for this decade. Then we would see a big difference between this recession and that of the early 1980s. Demand now is certainly weak, but industry is strong.

In the last recession, demand was weak and industry was weak, too—crippled by five years of Labour Government, by 10 years of inflation and by a generation of excessive union power.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall carry on.

In a recent study by Investors in Industry, 80 per cent. of the firms interviewed said that industry was better able to cope with recession now than in the early 1980s, and they are right. Industry has been transformed over the last decade. During the 1980s, manufacturing productivity increased by 58 per cent.—faster than in any other major country, including Japan. Manufactured exports rose by 60 per cent. in volume. The seemingly inexorable decline in our share of world trade since the war came to an end in the early 1980s, since when our share has held its own. That is all the more remarkable, given that, over the last 10 years, Italy, France, Germany, the United States and even Japan have all lost some of their share of world trade to the newly industrialised countries. But we have maintained our share over that period.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: This weekend, I talked to an industrialist in my constituency who drew my attention to a factor which may have escaped the Secretary of State. He said that he recalled that, in every Budget statement since 1979, when the Government were originally elected—12 years ago—the Chancellor of the day had committed himself to defeating and reducing inflation. He could not understand why, after all these years, the Government had not succeeded. He asked me to ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the Government were planning for a 5 per cent. reduction in manufacturing output this year. He could not understand how the Government could plan for a recession.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should have been able to tell him that the inflationary problem from which we are suffering dates back to the measures taken after the collapse of the world stock market in October 1987. At that time, the Labour party urged us to take even more inflationary action. If we had followed its advice, the problems that we face, and the downturn, would have been much more serious. I hope that the hon. Gentleman told his friend that.

The key to competitiveness is quality. Total quality management was an idea born in America, developed in Japan, but now adopted by Britain, which is in the vanguard of implementation in Europe. The British standard for total quality management has, over the past decade, effectively become the European and international standard. Already, some 12,000 British companies have gained certification for quality, compared with just 200 in France and a negligible number so far in Germany. Our lead on this front will give our companies a vital edge in the years to come, amusing though the shadow Chancellor and his colleagues may find quality.

Although the Opposition make great play of the predicted short-term fall in investment this year, they ignore the strong growth in investment to record levels in recent years. On last Monday's "Panorama" programme, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East claimed that our current problems arose because, since the last recession, the Government had failed to ensure that

"any consumer demand increase be accompanied and preceded by industrial investment".

He could not be more wrong. Between 1981 and 1989, investment grew almost twice as fast as consumer spending. That is a marked contrast with the recovery from the 1975 recession under Labour, when consumption grew almost twice as fast as investment. That has been completely reversed this time around.

The improved performance of the British economy over the decade has been the result of a series of reforms, but three key elements have been competition, privatisation, and wider share ownership. Nowhere is the contrast between our policies and those of the Opposition more clearly highlighted than in the Chancellor's decision to sell off more British Telecom shares. We believe in privatisation. Labour is committed to renationalising British Telecom, not to mention the water industry and the national grid. Our programme of privatisation is being

copied around the world. By contrast, the Labour party is the only major party east or west of the old iron curtain which still plans to extend state ownership.

We believe in spreading share ownership more widely and more deeply. Hence my right hon. Friend's plans to encourage high street share shops and to introduce other imaginative methods of spreading share ownership more widely and deeply when he sells more of BT. By contrast, Labour would threaten the value of the investments of 1·2 million people, many of them employees, by taking control of BT and requiring it to make £20 billion-worth of uncommercial investment in cable.

Mr. Gordon Brown: When was that statement made?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman said it in his last but one policy document. The phrase used was:

"We shall require British Telecom to make investments."

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to withdraw or deny that?

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Lilley: I shall set the timing of my own speech, and I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman if he proposes to respond to the point that I made.

Mr. Brown: The Secretary of State did not give way.

Mr. Lilley: I am about to give way now.

Mr. Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman point to the quotation in which I say that £20 billion of public money will be used for cabling Britain?

Mr. Lilley: The costing was done by ACOST. The Labour party has not costed its own pledge. It has said that it would require British Telecom to make those decisions and investments.

We on this side believe in greater competition. It is bringing cheaper calls, more choice, and better services in telecommunications. The Labour party could do little but sneer at competition when I announced on 5 March the end of the telecommunications duopoly.

I am very pleased with the interest that has already been expressed in obtaining new licences, so I am today publishing guidance notes for firms wishing to enter the market. We said that the consumer would benefit from lower prices. I am delighted to be able to tell the House that there will be a rolling programme of price reductions by British Telecom over the coming months.

On 2 April, the price of local and trunk telephone calls will fall by 4·5 per cent. and 7·3 per cent. respectively. On 10 June, British Telecom expects to reduce the cost of all international calls by 10 per cent. On 1 August, a new, tighter price cap will be imposed on British Telecom's charges, and they will fall by 6·25 per cent. in real terms. As the rate of inflation falls over the coming months, I expect that British Telecom's charges will fall not only in real terms, but in absolute terms as well. That is excellent news for the consumer.

I said that customers would benefit from increased choice. I can now announce two major steps to achieve that—one will liberalise satellite communications, putting us at the forefront in Europe; and the other will enable companies to install their own telecommunication networks. Both schemes will be in place by July. I believe that both will be welcomed by industry, especially by the major companies, including the many that are coming to this country because we now have the most liberal regime for telecommunications.

When we last debated industrial policy, we did not have the benefit of Labour's long-heralded policy document "Modern Manufacturing Strength". The Labour party clearly did not feel that it would stand up to close examination, so it postponed publication until after a debate of its own calling. When it finally was published, all it contained was the same old policies repackaged and relaunched for the umpteenth time. I suppose we should not have been surprised—the one guarantee which we can be sure will be attached to the hon. Gentleman's policies is "Never knowingly under-launched".

The old familiars were all there. There was, as before; the same old mistrust of the market; the same old infatuation with state ownership, with the commitment to renationalise BT reaffirmed; and the same old reliance on quangos, subsidies and tax distortions.

The Independent newspaper—which is scarcely a friend of the Tory party—described the document as

"carefully crafted though philosophically confused—drafted to appeal to those worthies who enjoy sitting on joint working parties."

It concluded that the Labour party's

"understanding of the proper relationship between government and the market remains intellectually muddled."

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As we are discussing this year's Budget rather than next year's, can the Secretary of State please tell me precisely what measures in this year's Budget are designed to help the hard-pressed knitwear, textile and clothing industries, which form the bulk of employment in my constituency?

Mr. Lilley: I believe that all the measures that my right hon. Friend announced—especially those that I enumerated at the beginning of my speech—will benefit the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman seriously believes that we should have a different tax regime for each industry, he should first tackle those on his own Front Bench, who do not appear to have such a policy.

The Economist was equally devastating about the Labour party's policy document:

"Sceptics still searching for firm evidence of a real anti-inflation policy . . . will find, when they scratch the shiny new industrial policy, that it is corporatism updated and resprayed".

Nor were industrialists any more impressed, despite the Labour party's efforts to woo them. John Banham, the director of the Confederation of British Industry said:

"There remains, apparently a touching faith that the 'man in Whitehall knows best', and it is difficult to see how the proposals will be financed without levies on industry or raising personal taxes".

Quangos, subsidies, tax distortions—that is Labour's relaunched policy in a nutshell. It did not impress the newspapers; it did not impress British industry, and I am sure that it will not impress ordinary British people.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Would the Minister care to comment on the remarks by the boss of Rowntree Mackintosh, who says that the rise in VAT will affect jobs?

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

The boss of Cross Lee near my constituency says exactly the same, and all the employers in the clothing industry think that the move will damage jobs.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady should realise that the change is neutral. It is a switch of £4·25 billion of taxation from one tax to another, and it leaves the amount of money in people's pockets exactly the same.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Labour party has recently been trying to present itself as the friend of industry. Its Front-Bench spokesmen have been out visiting industrial companies. One suspects that this is the first time that many of them have met industrialists outside their own constituencies, because as far as I can discover, despite the size of the Front-Bench team, not one of its members has ever worked in industrial management.

To demonstrate its love of industry, the Labour party has selected seven industrial virgins, unsullied by any experience of industrial management. There are two former lecturers, a trade union official, a welfare rights officer, a television producer and a psychiatrist. Those are the people, apparently, who are going to pick winners, intervene, take industries back into state ownership and lay down an industrial strategy. When Caligula made his horse a consul, the people of Rome knew what he thought of them. I am pretty sure that British industry knows what the Labour party think of it now that Labour proposes to put it under the control of a group of lecturers, psychiatrists and television producers.

I do not know whether hon. Members saw the recent party political broadcast by the Labour party. In many ways, it was quite a professional effort. It showed pictures of those on the Front Bench, interspersed with pictures of industrial processes and products. But it was wonderfully revealing. It showed how out of touch and out of date the Labour party really is. Almost every process and product shown was at least 20 years old, and nearly every one had piled up huge losses.

Far from living up to the title of its recent policy document, "Modern Manufacturing Strength", the Labour party showed us that it believes in traditional manufacturing weakness. We saw men in cloth caps hammering in rivets by hand, the Flying Scotsman chuffing through the night and seaplanes floating at anchor. That was the best that the Labour party could do to describe modern British industry. It was a history lecturer's view of our industrial past, because Labour has nothing to offer our industrial future.

By contrast, this year's Budget is a Budget for our present problems and our future opportunities. It is the Budget of a Government with faith in the future of our industry, not nostalgia for the past. It is a Budget for the small businesses of today, which will be the bigger businesses of tomorrow. It will lay the foundations of our economic recovery and the basis of a fourth election victory.

4.13 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Since the "Budget for business" last Tuesday, 14,000 redundancies have been announced. Jobs have gone in Scotland, the north, the midlands and the south. They have gone in textiles, electronics, the retail trade and services. They have gone in every industry, service and occupation and, as I think Conservative Members will realise, they have gone in almost every constituency, too.

Companies are not going bankrupt because of bad management, indisciplined work forces or resistance to change, but because interest rates have been held too high for too long. In the face of the crisis confronting industry, the response of the Secretary of State today seems trivial, complacent and inadequate—a speech from a member of a Government who have failed.

Since the Budget, at least 300 companies have gone under, yet the Red Book admits—even if the Secretary of State refuses to do so—that, far from the recession drawing to a close, 1991 as a whole will see national income fall by 2 per cent.; manufacturing output by 5 per cent. and investment by almost 10 per cent. Unemployment will continue its inexorable rise beyond 2 million people. That shameful combination of events is not happening anywhere else in western Europe and it is rivalled in Britain by one post-war event only, the previous Tory recession.

I ask the Secretary of State to name any Chancellor facing a Budget in another country in western Europe where industrial output, investment, employment and exports are simultaneously falling by the same scale level. Can he name another country where the response would be a Budget that confirms a cut in the industry and training budgets?

Not once in the Secretary of State's speech did he mention the unemployed, the huge skill shortages that bedevil British industry—even in period of rapidly rising unemployment—or the sheer size and scale of the huge interest rate Bill that faces British industry, which is set at £20 billion this year, even after the 0·5 per cent cut. Yet we are told that we had a Budget for business. We were told that we had a Budget for business in 1979, and unemployment kept on rising. We were told that we had a Budget for business in 1980, but unemployment kept rising. Now we have another Budget for business, and I have news for the Secretary of State—as a result, unemployment will keep on rising. What is different about this Budget for business, except that it takes it for granted that thousands will go out of business?

As this Budget proves, there is one longer-running fiasco than the chaos over the poll tax of the past four years—the absence of a policy for industry throughout the 12 years of the Government. The tragedy is that, in this recession, growth is not giving way to slump on the road to the permanent elimination of inflation; growth has given way to recession on the road to the permanent elimination of much of our industrial capacity.

Our argument is clear: this Budget will do next to nothing for the unemployed; it will do little for training and, despite the corporation tax changes that we shall support, it will fail to prevent rising bankruptcies in industry. More than that, however, the Budget reveals that the Government now know that their flagship policies of the 1980s have failed and that they have no flagship policies for the 1990s to put in their place. That is revealed

not just in the Budget's attitude to industry, but by what has happened on the poll tax, the public sector deficit and social policy provision. They have no new flagship policies for the 1990s, other than to deal with the consequences of the policies that have failed.

What is the Government's response on the poll tax, on industry and on everything else? The first is to panic, then to dither, then to make a decision—any decision—as long as they think it will help to hold together the divided factions of the Conservative party. A brainstorming session here—it did not last long—a weekend retreat there, and, when the situation is more serious, a Monday morning retreat at Chequers. The Government have been in retreat because they are in retreat. Clearly the Prime Minister and his Ministers felt it safer to go off to the country and to talk to each other when they should have gone to the country to listen to the people.

What of the victims of the recession? Since the previous Budget, unemployment has risen by 60,000 in the north, 54,000 in the midlands and 173,000 men and women in the south and south-east. We have the fastest-rising unemployment in Europe—a 400,000 rise in a year—which is greater than that for the rest of western Europe combined.

What is the response of the Budget and of Ministers to the rising unemployment that they have created? That high unemployment, along with declining investment, should have led to a real Budget for business. Have the Government responded as they should have with the temporary work programme that Labour recommended in its Budget submission? Did they respond with a new skills programme for Britain, which we have advocated, so that Britain is ready with trained men and women to come out of the recession? Did they respond by following Labour's recommendation for a full 1 per cent. cut in interest rates? Did they respond with the manufacturing investment programme that we proposed? Did they respond, as common sense should have dictated, by reversing the £245 million cut in the training budget in the year in which we are supposedly beginning a training revolution and the £300 million cut in the industry budget, which will have an effect this year?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): The hon. Gentleman makes much of comparisons between this country's training budget and those of other countries. Will he explain the figures used in the shadow Chancellor's Budget broadcast? Is he aware that they appear to have been based on a survey commissioned by the EC from a variety of individual national bodies with no common supervision and no common definitions of skilled and unskilled? The results purported to show that the low-skilled countries had more skills than the high-skilled countries. Does the hon. Gentleman think that a survey that purports to show that Greece has a more skilled work force than Germany is accurate?

Mr. Brown: Is the Chancellor telling us that he can visit industries and companies and find that we are spending sufficient on training, investment and skills? Is he really telling us that skill shortages do not exist? We have not spent enough on training.

Mr. Lamont: Will the hon. Gentleman answer the question? How can he maintain that those statistics which were broadcast to millions of people are remotely accurate? They are not.

Mr. Brown: My right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor was referring to a European Community survey on training. His point is proved by surveys by not only the European Community but the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. If people have any doubts about the training crisis that this country faces, they need not read Labour party or Trades Union Congress documents; they need only read the report published by the CBI a few months ago which said that £800 million more had to be spent on training and which drew attention to the training crisis which has developed as a result of the Government's policies. What are the Government doing?

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The hon. Gentleman referred to possible expenditure of £800 million more on training. Is he committing the Labour party to spending that sum immediately in the first year of Government?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my remarks. I said that the CBI drew attention to the fact that £800 million more had to be spent. If the hon. Gentleman had read the report, he would know that the CBI said that industry had to spend £800 million more. If the hon. Gentleman had been here on the first day of the Budget debate, he would have heard my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor draw attention to our training and skill proposals—the temporary employment scheme and the skills programme which add up to additional public expenditure of £900 million. We are committed to that.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about industry possibly paying more, but he talked about additional expenditure by a Labour Government. Will that money be spent at once or will it be spent as resources allow? If the hon. Gentleman does not know the answer, perhaps he will again have a word with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who said that the money would be spent as resources allowed.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is a former Minister with responsibility in these matters. If he reads our Budget submission, as the Chancellor undoubtedly has, he will see that we are committed to investing more in training and skills.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the money be spent immediately or as resources allow? We are talking not about what industry will spend but about the Labour party's proposals. For the third time, will that money be spent at once or as resources allow?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor made it clear in a press conference held during the first debate on the Budget that Labour would have entered into that commitment if it had introduced the Budget last week. No one believes that the £25 million put towards training—not this year but next year—by the Government in the Budget is in any way adequate to deal with the skills crisis that this country faces.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman does not know the answer.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman says that I do not know the answer. I have made it clear that this is a commitment by the Labour party to invest in training and skills.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman gets so excited when I speak in the House. I have made clear the Labour party's commitment to investment in training and skills. That commitment is welcomed not just by people in the Labour party but by people throughout the country.

People find it astonishing not just that the Government have failed to act on training and skills, but that their main contribution over the past few months towards dealing with the problems of the unemployed has been to provide not jobs for the jobless but billboards for advertisements about the jobless. No one can have failed to notice the huge poster campaign ordered by the Government and directed at the unemployed. The posters contain slogans such as:

"I can work, I will work, I am going to work, I will get a job."

That campaign was commissioned from an advertising agency. There is not much in it for the jobless, but a great deal for Saatchi and Saatchi.

The hidden message of all those advertisements is dishonourable. It suggests that all that stands between the unemployed and a job is the determination to find one. Firms are going out of business not because the commitment, flexibility and competence of workers or management are too low but because interest rates are too high. What do Ministers intend to tell their constituents who have been made redundant because of high interest rates? Those people have been made redundant through no fault of their own and they include shop workers, small business men and business women, the self-employed, engineers and building workers. Will Ministers tell them that it is due to their personal failure that they are unemployed, as though attaching to the unemployed the blame that should be attached to the Government?

Is it not disgraceful to stigmatise the unemployed as uncertain, irresolute, incompetent and, as the advertisements suggest, dithering? It is not the unemployed but the Government who are guilty of those moral failings. The people at whom the advertisements are directed believed the Government when they said at the beginning of the 1980s that they would bring about an economic transformation. Those people made sacrifices for the Government and they were told to believe that an economic miracle had resulted. Now they find that the Government who made them unemployed are implying that somehow the unemployed are to blame. It is not the unemployed who have let down the Government, it is the Government who have let down the unemployed.

The British Textile Confederation predicts job losses of 25,000 this year. That is 500 a week. The Engineering Employers Federation says that 100,000 jobs will be lost, and that is 2,000 a week. The Building Employers Confederation predicts job losses of nearly 100,000 this year. Let us look at predictions, which even the Chancellor must accept, for our industrial future. Growth is rising by over 2 per cent. in France and Italy and by 3 per cent. in Germany, but in Britain it is falling by 2 per cent. Manufacturing output is rising by nearly 1 per cent. in Italy, 2·5 per cent. in Spain and 4 per cent. in Germany, but it is falling by 5 per cent. in Britain.

The Budget simply assumes that, having entered the downturn first in Europe, we will not be the first to leave it but almost certainly the last. On Tuesday, the Chancellor told us that this was all part of the ordinary economic cycle and that it was inevitable in a market economy. In other economies, the economic cycle means higher growth giving way to lower growth on the road to higher growth again. In Britain under the Tories, the economic cycle is growth giving way to slump on the road to a permanent loss of industrial capacity.

I shall give the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the real position of British industry after 12 years of this Government. He said that we should look at the record as a whole. The real position is that, when the Budget predictions for 1991 are taken into account, manufacturing output in Britain will have grown over the past twelve and a half years slower than any country in the EEC, any of the G7 countries or any of the 20 top countries in the OECD. We will be at the bottom of the manufacturing league.

In 12 years manufacturing output in France has risen by 50 per cent. It has risen by 66 per cent. in Germany and by almost 150 per cent. in Belgium, but in Britain by the end of this year the figure for output will be only 6 per cent. In those 12 years we have had North sea oil and Government promises of miracles. We are entitled now to judge the Government not on their promises but on their performance. They have put Britain at the bottom of the manufacturing growth league, so what credibility do Ministers have left? They received warnings throughout the 1980s, including the House of Lords report in 1985, and subsequently received further warnings even from their own advisers.

What is the Secretary of State's explanation for the Government's neglect? Earlier, the right hon. Gentleman referred to his "Panorama" interview, when he was asked what had gone wrong with manufacturing industry since the House of Lords' famous report. He was asked why the Government had failed to act and ignored the warning signals. Did he stand up for the principles of the free market? Did he show resolution and say that industry must stand on its own feet? Did he defend the record of the two Chancellors of the Exchequer whom he so loyally served, including the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)? Did the Secretary of State continue to fly the colours of the previous Prime Minister and to protect her reputation? When asked the vital question of whether, in the mid-1980s, the Government had taken manufacturing industry seriously enough—yes or no—the Secretary of State paused, hesitated, dare I say dithered, and replied, "Maybe not."

The right hon. Gentleman went on to qualify that assertion with an astonishing excuse. He said:

"I certainly wasn't a Minister. I was a bag carrier at the time."

So much for collective responsibility. So much for ideological resolution. In other words, "It wasn't me. I was a bag carrier at the time." They were all bag carriers at the time.

Why did not the right hon. Gentleman defend his free market philosophy and say that his No Turning Back group philosophy was the best way forward? Why did he not assert that problems are far better solved by industry

itself without Government intervention? Was it because the right hon. Gentleman is trapped, as are the other members of the Government, between the ideology in which they still believe and the knowledge that it has failed?

The reaction today of all Ministers faced with problems in respect of industry, the poll tax, or anything else, is to say anything, as long as they think that they can sell it to all the factions of a divided Conservative party. What credibility do any of them have now? They said that manufacturing industry was merely an obsession with the Labour party and that the trade deficit was of little consequence.

The same Ministers basked briefly in the glory of the 1988 Budget, when they said that Britain was top of the league of manufacturing industry growth in terms of competitiveness, and that the supply side of the economy had been transformed. They claimed that the Government had revitalised the economy and had restored national pride and that no policy for industry was needed.

What credibility do the Government have left when they try to tell us now that manufacturing matters, that the trade deficit is important after all, and that there should be a policy for industry? The right hon. Gentleman may have been carrying the bags in 1985, but his failures since then mean that he must now carry the can.

Only a few days ago the House of Lords Select Committee on manufacturing industry reported that our share of world markets in manufacturing is too small; the implications for our future prosperity are grave; if market forces alone are to determine the course of events, it is conceivable that we will end up with no significant British-owned manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom; and that the Government must abandon their neglect of manufacturing industry. Confronted by the fact that manufacturing growth is falling this year by 5 per cent., investment in manufacturing industry is set to fall, and overall business investment is set to fall by 9·75 per cent., and given the fact that, with 1992 in view, investment in France is increasing by 4 per cent., in Germany by 5 per cent., and in Italy by 4 per cent.—but is falling in Britain by 9·75 per cent.——

Mr. Lamont: A few minutes ago, in giving figures for industrial production, the hon. Gentleman gave the impression, within the hearing of everyone in the House, that industrial production is growing everywhere in Europe except in this country. Leaving aside the fact that industrial production in the United States and Canada has also fallen compared with one year ago, will the hon. Gentleman explain why industrial production in France and Italy is lower than it was a year ago?

Mr. Brown: I have the figures produced by the OECD. The economic outlook produced in December 1990 shows industrial production in Italy rising by 0·6 per cent. in 1991 and that is a fact. It is also rising in France. *[Interruption.]* I am not prepared to take the Chancellor's word for it, when the figures that he produces continually turn out to be inaccurate.

Mr. Lamont: Will the hon. Gentleman table a written question and accept my word?

Mr. Brown: I shall be happy to table a written question to the Chancellor, but the right hon. Gentleman will agree that I should go on the information produced by the OECD and by the EC and that it is quite fair for me to listen to them in advance of listening to the Chancellor.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose*——

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): If the Chancellor looked at his own Red Book, which he was not very good at quoting from in his Budget speech, he would find this:

"In France and Italy growth in 1991 is expected to be around 1¼ per cent.".

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Not only is that figure recorded in the Red Book, but I have the OECD forecasts for France and Italy in 1991. I am afraid that I prefer to listen to the EC and the OECD on these matters than to listen to this Chancellor.

What is the Government's response to what the House of Lords said about manufacturing industry? What is their response to the recommendations made by the House of Lords which are similar to the policy proposals that the Labour party has published over the past few months?

Although the House of Lords Select Committee recommended that support for industrial research and development should be increased, and although the Minister responsible says that he is in sympathy with that, supply estimates for the past few years show that, in 1989-90, support for industrial research and development was planned at £152 million, in 1990-91 it was planned at £125 million and now it is planned at only £104 million for the coming year. Equally, when the House of Lords Select Committee says that it wants more support for research and development in small companies, and when Ministers say that with the new spur scheme they are doing far more than ever before, what do the Government's own spending estimates reveal other than that they planned to spend £24 million last year, they plan to spend £12·8 million this year and they plan to spend only £12 million next year?

When the Secretary of State and the Select Committee are agreed on the need for regional technology organisations to be expanded, when the House of Lords wants development agencies for England to be considered —something that the Labour party has long advocated —and when the report says that the activities of the development agencies in Scotland and Wales should be taken as a model for exploiting more effectively the technological and industrial potential of other areas of the United Kingdom, what does the Secretary of State do? He does nothing but cut regional and general industrial support from a planned £309 million last year to a planned £250 million this year to only £157 million for next year —a cut of almost 40 per cent. over two years.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I have given way quite enough.

When the House of Lords calls for new support for innovation, for genuine programmes which are not simply for the sake of gaining political kudos and for a new initiative and demands tax credits for additional research, corporation tax allowances for new investments and what the Labour party has been asking for in its recent document, "Modern Manufacturing Strength", what is the Government's reaction? They propose to cut the industry budget for the coming year by £245 million. They have even cut the consulting initiative in science and technology by 10 per cent. and cut regional innovation grants. The

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Chancellor's reaction to the House of Lords report on manufacturing industry is to cut support in all those areas —to cut the industry budget as a whole.

One of the few things for which the Budget shows support is bureaucracy and administration in the Exchequer. The Government have no industrial policy worth the name. Their policy is simply to cut and cut. The Labour party stands for industrial opportunity for Britain, whereas the Conservative party stands only for opportunism in the run-up to the next general election.

The centrepiece of the Chancellor's Budget strategy was the retreat from the poll tax via the new surcharge on VAT. That is the sad consequence of the flagship policy, which, unfortunately, not only poisons local government finance but contaminates the whole of public finance. The poll tax has swallowed £175 million in start-up costs, £500 million in additional running costs and £300 million in rebate administration. It will cost £65 million to sort out the chaos of this year's bills. In other words, the first £1 billion will have gone simply on administration of the tax, with not one additional service provided—not one home help, teacher or policeman to show for the first £1 billion. The industry budget has been cut by £350 million, and the training budget has been reduced by £245 million—all to cover up the first £1 billion-worth of the Government's poll tax mistakes.

There are four contradictions at the heart of the Budget. First, Ministers tell us that they will reduce household bills by cutting the poll tax; in fact, the VAT increase—the poll tax surcharge—added to other tax increases, will push household bills up. Secondly, Ministers tell us that the poll tax will be abolished at the earliest opportunity; in fact, it is being kept for two more years, and the Government are determined, even then, to retain a central part of it. Thirdly, the Government tell us that they are helping business; far from stemming the tide of business bankruptcies, the Budget is based on the assumption that more bankruptcies are on the way. The most cruel deception of all is the Government's contention that they are creating a classless society. How will the creation of a classless society be helped when, in their first 100 days in office, the Government have made more than 100,000 men and women unemployed? How can they claim to be encouraging opportunity for all when, for 2 million unemployed people, opportunity does not exist?

The Government now know that the poll tax is wrong, but they have no clear policy to put local government finance right. They now know that they have got training policy wrong, but their ideology prevents them from implementing a programme to put it right. They now know that neglect of industry is wrong, but their crude free market ideology prevents them from adopting any policy that would help.

Trapped between the ideology that they alone support and the fact that the country is now rejecting them, what do they do? When Labour demands a child benefit rise of £2·30 for all children, the Government dispense to most children 25p—the price of a pint of milk. When Labour demands fairness for pensioners 52 weeks of the year—as we did earlier this year—the Government grudgingly give heating allowances, for two weeks only, to those who are lucky. When Labour demands a policy for training in industry, the Government offer a fraction of what is needed, because they have no concept of what could be gained. When Labour demands properly funded, high-quality public services, we get yet more promises. It happened again at the weekend. We have had 12 years of promises.

What will the public remember about the present Government? They will remember them as the Government who brought the chaos of the poll tax; pushed thousands of people into unemployment, and hundreds of thousands more into poverty; made high unemployment, along with high interest rates, the main instrument of economic policy; and, by their neglect of industry over the period of North sea oil revenues, dissipated a unique opportunity to prepare Britain for the 1990s.

What Britain needed was a Budget that would not only take us out of recession but prepare the whole country for the long-term challenges that we face. The Government have given us, instead, a short-term Budget—at best, short-term palliatives from a Government dominated by short-termism and, thank goodness, with only a short term to go.

4.44 pm

Mr. Nigel Lawson (Blaby): We have just heard from the hon. Member for Dumfermline, East (Mr. Brown) a speech bearing a very close resemblance to other speeches that he has made in this House. Fortunately, as I do not attend frequently nowadays, I am not obliged to hear many of them. The mixture is very well known. The phrases bear the smell of midnight oil, but the hon. Gentleman's figures are made up as he goes along, and collapse as soon as they are challenged. I will give the hon. Gentleman a word of friendly advice. If he were to spend only half as much time checking his figures as he spends polishing his phrases, his speeches might improve.

The other characteristic of the hon. Gentleman's speech was a characteristic of many speeches before he was on the Opposition Front Bench—perhaps before he was even a Member of this House. I refer to the period of the last recession—1980 and 1981. At that time, the Opposition not only pointed out that the country was in recession—something that was well known, and that the Government made no effort to hide—but implied that the recession would go on for ever. As the House and the country now know, that recession was relatively short-lived, and was followed by the most vigorous and longest period of expansion that this country has known in recent years. The same will happen again.

Once more, the hon. Member for Dumfermline, East has tried to suggest that a recession, which will not be so severe as the last one—he himself has said so—will go on for ever. It will not go on for ever, and it is important to demonstrate that fact. It can be demonstrated only by deeds rather than words and, I would add to my right hon. Friends on the Government front bench, it seems to me that that is not wholly ungermane to the timing of the next general election.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his Budget. It is not merely because of the very kind words he addressed to me at the beginning of his speech, for which I thank him, that I say that it is a very good Budget.

In the Budget debate last year, I argued the case for early entry into the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system—initially within the wider

band. Happily, that took place. It seems that I may have more influence as a Back Bencher than I did as Chancellor of the Exchequer. This now provides the framework for the Government's economic policy. But the Chancellor of the day still has to exercise, within that framework, a Budget judgment. To my mind, my right hon. Friend has got the judgment right—a neutral Budget, allowing the economic stabilisers full play, but with no nonsense about some discretionary, counter-cyclical fiscal policy. And this is all in the context of a commitment to a balanced budget over the economic cycle as a whole, which is absolutely right.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The right hon. Gentleman, from the Back Benches, is claiming credit for this country's entry into the ERM. Why did he fail so dismally to persuade his former Cabinet colleagues to go back to the old rating system, which he regarded as so desirable?

Mr. Lawson: All will be revealed when I publish my memoirs.

If I have a concern about the overall fiscal aggregates, it lies not on the tax side but on the public expenditure side. In 1979, we inherited a desperately weak fiscal position. Over the years since then, we have made our fiscal position one of the strongest in the world. We have had a public sector surplus for a number of years. This was not solely, or even chiefly, a cyclical phenomenon. One has only to look at other countries, some of which also had a period of vigorous growth in the 1980s. None of them has achieved the strong fiscal position that we have secured. It was not the result of cyclical movements.

It stemmed in part from tax reform—the switch from high rates of tax, which in many instances were effectively voluntary, to lower rates of tax which companies and individuals had to pay. It stemmed even more from the firm control of public expenditure. Over the whole of the six years from 1983-84 to 1989-90, general Government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, rose by a total of 4 per cent. That was an extremely small increase. Over the next three years, however—only half of the period to which I have just referred—from 1989-90 to 1992-93, general Government expenditure is planned, according to the Red Book, to rise by 5 per cent. It is planned to rise by more over the next three years than over the whole of the six years to 1989-90. And as we all know, public expenditure has a tendency to outrun what is planned for it. I have quoted what was achieved compared with what is now planned.

Again, table 1.2 in the Red Book shows that about two thirds of the deterioration in this year's public sector borrowing requirement, compared with what was envisaged at the time of the Budget, is due to a public expenditure overrun, even though public expenditure is less affected—it is affected to some extent—by the economic cycle than are tax revenues.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is absolutely firm in his resolve to maintain control of public expenditure. It is vital, however, that he enjoys the support of the entire Cabinet, and especially that of the Prime Minister.

As for the economy as a whole, inflation is clearly coming down. That is thanks to the so-called one-club policy of high interest rates, which was so derided in some quarters. I share my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's view that the recession will end and that the economy will start to pick up again later this year. As I said earlier, the recession, although difficult and unpleasant, will prove to be less severe in terms of loss of output than the recession of a decade ago.

I shall not detain the House by going through all the individual measures in the Budget, most of which I applaud. I shall, however, mention one or two things that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not do. First, he did not abolish a tax. I rather regret that. It was a good tradition to abolish a tax in every Budget. I realise, of course, that my right hon. Friend was constrained by the Budget arithmetic. I would, however, gently draw his attention to petroleum revenue tax, of which I have many memories as a former Secretary of State for Energy. Petroleum revenue tax is one of the most complicated and extraordinary taxes on the statute book. An entire division of the Inland Revenue—the oil taxation office—is almost wholly dedicated to looking after it. The Red Book tells us that the expected yield for the coming year is precisely zero. It is a tax that my right hon. Friend could possibly do away with without distorting his Budget judgment.

I realise that there are always those—my right hon. Friend's officials and, even more so, officials in the Department of Energy—who say, "You never know, there might be a sudden explosion of oil prices in future, and then the tax will come into its own again." We have heard predictions of an explosion of oil prices for a long time. For example, in the first debate on the Gulf, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) gave the most extraordinary Cassandra-like warnings. Included among them was the prediction that the price of oil would be $100 a barrel should there be a Gulf war. The price now is about $18 a barrel. An explosion in the price of oil is about as credible as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East. As I have said, PRT is a tax that could be dispensed with.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not yield to the clamour to bring back 100 per cent. first-year capital allowances or other forms of special allowances for business and industry. Instead, he chose to reduce corporation tax. He was absolutely right to do that, and I commend him for it. He has avoided the distortions that would otherwise have been incurred, and the reduction in corporation tax will attract overseas investment into this country far more effectively than anything else.

It is important always to bear in mind—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not make this point in his Budget speech but I know that he did not want to make the speech too long, and I thought that it was just about the right length—the difference between the main corporation tax rate and the basic rate of income tax. That really determines the incentive for debt finance of industry as against equity finance. Ideally there should be no distortion at all—the rates should be the same.

One of the reasons why I reduced the rate of corporation tax from 52 per cent. to 35 per cent.—it was not the main reason—was that corporation tax of 52 per cent. was offsettable against the cost of loan capital or borrowing, whereas only a 30 per cent. deduction was allowed under the imputation system for dividends. That meant that the incentive to engage in debt finance was very strong. It was and is desirable to narrow the gap as much as possible, and I narrowed it substantially. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer recalled, the

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gap then widened somewhat as a result of reductions in the basic rate of income tax. It is right that he should be narrowing it again.

Mr. Sheldon: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is a distortion in the corporation tax capital allowances? Only 25 per cent. is given in tax allowances in the first year. Many items of plant and machinery are worth less than 75 per cent. after the first year. That is the distortion, and capital allowances should be changed to accommodate it.

Mr. Lawson: It was the 100 per cent. first-year write-off which was the distortion. The 25 per cent. reducing balance is close to actual commercial depreciation for the vast majority of capital equipment. It is true that there are some items of capital equipment that depreciate more rapidly and I therefore introduced a special provision in the 1985 Finance Act to take account of short-life assets. The right hon. Gentleman should be reassured that this has already been catered for.

Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not yield to the clamour in some quarters for personal allowances to be increased by more than statutory indexation. Indeed, in some respects he did less than that, because he did not increase some allowances at all. My right hon. Friend was right to resist the clamour. The maxim that almost everyone should pay, although not decisive in all contexts, is relevant to income tax. My right hon. Friend is right to place emphasis—when the time comes for reductions in the burden of income tax—on a reduction in the basic rate. I was glad to hear that.

The concept that everyone should pay brings me to the measure which inevitably dominated this year's Budget, and that is the massive switch from local taxation in the shape of the community charge to an extra 2½ per cent. on value added tax. As a result, the yield of local tax—that is to say, the community charge—will fall from 20 per cent. of local authority revenues in the year that has now ended to an estimated 11 per cent. in the year which lies ahead of us. In itself, and judged apart from the background and the context, I believe that it was a retrograde step. If it was politically inescapable, it is yet further evidence of the damage that the poll tax has wrought.

In so far as an ideal system of local government finance exists in this wicked world, it would concentrate on bringing to an end the two muddles that have bedevilled local authority finance for as long as I can recall. The first of the two muddles is presented by the two tiers of local government so that no one is clear about which tier is responsible for which part of the single Bill received by local taxpayers. The second muddle is the confusion between local government and central Government responsibilities.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): We are all fascinated by this part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. Why, as he felt so strongly about the poll tax, did he not resign over that issue rather than over the much less important issue that he gave as his reason for resigning?

Mr. Lawson: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has held high office in his time and I suspect that he did not agree with all his party's policies, but I do not recall him resigning. At least it cannot be said that I was not prepared to give up my office when I felt it necessary to do so.

If those two muddles could be resolved, we would come as close to accountability as possible. If a single tier of local authority wholly financed the services for which it was responsible, and if central Government financed 100 per cent. of those services for which they are responsible, we would at last achieve clarity and the possibility of more accountability. To achieve that, the Government of the day would have to transfer responsibility for certain functions from local to central Government. I believe that there is a strong case for so doing.

Whereas such a solution was thinkable before the Budget, I fear it is unthinkable now. I say that with some regret. Now that local authorities are to raise only 11 per cent. of their total revenues from local taxation—that is the forecast—it is no longer possible. The figure of 11 per cent. comes from table 6.7 of the Red Book and is clearly correct. The community charge rebates must be deducted to arrive at the true figure of what is being raised by local authority taxation. It is inconceivable that local government responsibilities should be shrunk to that extent.

We must dispose of the misconception that local taxation was carrying too large a share of the burden. That is manifestly absurd, as a moment's reflection will demonstrate. Local taxpayers and central Government taxpayers are the same people. The issue is the nature of the tax. For example, if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer had decided to reduce the community charge by £140 a head and switch that amount to a central tax in the shape of a new poll tax levied nationally at £140 a head, would everyone have thrown their hats in the air and said, "What a tremendous improvement"? The problem has nothing to do with the balance, but everything to do with the nature of the tax.

Incidentally, there is no truth in the suggestion that, the Government were somehow mean with grants when the community charge was first introduced. The community charge was first introduced in England and Wales in 1990 and the increase in the total central Government grant to local authorities for that year was an unprecedented £2·6 billion—far in excess of the rate of inflation.

It is the nature of the poll tax that makes it unable to bear that burden. Although many people disliked rates, rates could bear such a burden. I recall the Government's Green Paper, published in December 1981, entitled "Alternatives to Domestic Rates", which came to the conclusion that there was no satisfactory alternative to domestic rates. That Green Paper was published and we did not do so badly in the 1983 general election. We continued with the rating system from 1983 to 1987 and did not do so badly in the 1987 general election either. Although we made a pledge in 1987 to go over to the community charge, if anyone believes that that was why we won the election with a large majority, they were not canvassing the same houses and visiting the same factories as I was.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Was not the reason why we did not suffer badly the fact that we did not have a revaluation for 17 years? When there was a revaluation in Scotland, we were nearly annihilated.

Mr. Lawson: I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that issue because, although it is an absurdity, it is believed by many people besides my hon. Friend, who understandably picks up things that he hears other people say. I do not blame my hon. Friend. The Scottish revaluation was a disaster because it was implemented overnight, from one year to the next. Even the 1983 revaluation, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) will recall, was phased in over a period. Everyone knows that any revaluation must be phased in gradually over a considerable period. If the change is made overnight, it is a total disaster. But it is quite unnecessary to do so, and no sensible Government would implement a revaluation in England and Wales on that basis.

Mr. Tim Raison (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lawson: Much as I should like to hear what my hon. Friend has to say, I do not wish to take up too much time. Perhaps he will tell me afterwards.

Mr. Wallace: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: If I give way to anyone, it will be to my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), who asked first.

Clearly, we could not go into the next general election with the poll tax. Any new tax must always be broadly acceptable to the majority of British people. Whatever arguments may be adduced, the poll tax was not broadly acceptable to the British people. There was no way in which it could be sustained in a democracy. That was both predictable and predicted.

Where do we go from here? There is to be a new tax—part property tax, part poll tax. Even the Opposition are intelligent enough to discern that the question now is, which part will predominate? Let us suppose that the basic charge is calculated for a household with three adults and that discounts are applied. For example, if there are two adults there will be a discount and if there is only one adult there will be a double discount. If that is the plan, everything depends on the size of the discount. If the discount is large, the poll tax will reappear and we shall have son of poll tax. It would be absurd to go through such an upheaval merely to change from poll tax to son of poll tax, so the discount must be small.

There should also be—to use the jargon—minimum equalisation. By that I mean that the basis for valuation should be the local area and not, to take the other extreme, the nation as a whole. Those who live in districts where property values are particularly high should not be penalised for so doing. In each district, the relativities should take the strain. Those who live in relatively more expensive houses in one district would pay more and those who live in relatively lower-valued houses would pay less. That would have been the right answer before the switch in my right hon. Friend's Budget, but now, as a result of that switch, there are public expenditure dangers, as well as political difficulties, inherent in the sort of local taxation now envisaged.

One phenomenon that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned in his Budget speech—it started during the latter period of the Labour party's term of office, so it is a non-partisan point—was that the total grant to local authorities became a steadily smaller percentage of the total money received by local authorities. That happened under both Governments, for precisely the same reason. If one is determined to control public expenditure, no other outcome is possible.

Local authorities will always want to spend more—Labour authorities certainly do and many Conservative-controlled authorities also want to. If one then gives local authorities a grant to finance, for example, 50 per cent. of a reasonable level of expenditure, they always spend more, so the grant becomes less than 50 per cent. If one says the next year, "We shall validate that and give them 50 per cent. again," it simply encourages local authorities to spend ever more, so there is no control of public expenditure.

That is why we had the inevitable process, which started in 1976 when the then Secretary of State for the Environment in the Labour Government said that the party was over and, for the first time, a serious attempt was made to control local authority spending, of a progression of local authority rates taking a higher proportion, and grants to local authorities taking a steadily lower proportion, of total local revenues.

Why has there been such a welcome among local authority spokesmen for the reduction in the amount that they will have to finance themselves? They see it as a wonderful way of starting all over again and overspending all over again. I realise that the Government hope that they can restrain all that by capping. But capping, although essential, is far from perfect. If the Government try to put too great a strain on capping, it will not work.

Another reason for the difficulty is the gearing effect. If local revenues are such a small proportion of total revenues—they are down to 11 per cent. according to the Government's Red Book figures—it means that, if a local authority decides that it will spend 10 per cent. more than the Government think is justifiable and right, local taxes, which are only 11 per cent., will have to rise by 90 per cent. The consequences of that do not need to be spelt out, because they are so clear. Therefore, capping will be asked to bear too great a burden.

As a result of the switch introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor I am driven to the conclusion first drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell). As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor went as far as he did in cutting the amount of revenue that local authorities raise, the Government must now—unless they reverse the policy, and I am sure that they will not do that—go the whole hog and abolish local authority taxation altogether. There is a precedent for that. As hon. Members will recall, when the last Labour Government advanced their proposals for a Scottish Assembly, it was not given any tax-raising powers whatever. I can say with the boldness of one who is not standing at the next general election that a Scottish Assembly would have been even more important than the Blaby district council, and what is good enough for a Scottish Assembly must be good enough for local authorities in England and Wales.

Such a scheme might be financed by changing the zero rate of VAT to 5 per cent. If that is not enough, one year's non-indexation of personal allowances, on top of the zero to 5 per cent. VAT, would achieve the result. There would be great benefit and value in doing that. At present, there is a serious distortion. When Lord Barber introduced the two-rate VAT, the two rates were 10 per cent. and zero; so, although there was a distortion, the gap was only 10 per cent. That has now been widened to 17·5 per cent., which is far too much and economically highly undesirable.

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Therefore, something closer to the original pattern of the tax, with the same sort of incidence, could be restored by putting the zero rate up to 5 per cent., giving 5 per cent. and 17·5 per cent., so that the gap would be only slightly greater than it was when the tax was introduced.

I am encouraged in my view because the Government appear to be engaged in yet another consultative process, and that is my contribution to it. However, I have to say that the Government are in danger of giving consultation a bad name. Consultation as an aid to government has an important place, but we are now in danger of seeing consultation as a substitute for government. In relation to the shape of local government, the principle of single-tier authorities should be a firm Government decision, with consultation on the way in which it can best and most sensibly be implemented. However, consultation on the nature of the new local tax is nothing less than an infallible recipe for maximising dissent.

I noted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor wisely did not enter into consultation about his switch from the community charge to 17·5 per cent. VAT. I congratulate him on how well the secret was kept—he would not have dreamed of entering into consultations. During my six years as Chancellor, I introduced a far-reaching programme of tax reform. If I had put the process out for consultation, it would have been impossible to enact a single reform.

I think that it was Pierre Mendès France who said that to govern was to choose. I agree with that. To appear to be unable to choose is to appear to be unable to govern.

5.18 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): We have heard some of the thoughts of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) on local government taxation, but the Government's problems with it relate to here and now. They cannot wait for local government reform, which will take at least a year or two, unless they introduce further emergency legislation such as we will be debating tomorrow, which they will presumably pass, so flying in the face of reasonable ways of doing business here.

Under the old rating system, there were people who were losers. By introducing the poll tax, the Government converted a number of those losers to gainers. As a result of further discussions and consultations, they are now about to change the new gainers to losers. So losers have become gainers and then losers again. The Government have a political dilemma here.

Whenever the right hon. Member for Blaby speaks, a soft glow of nostalgia comes over us, and his period of office seems almost pleasant by comparison with what we are going through at present.

The right hon. Member for Blaby talked about the control of public expenditure. He has lost that battle. If the Government are to be a caring Government, they can do so only by spending money. However, there is a dilemma for them. They are still talking about reducing income tax to 20p in the pound. The one thing that they cannot do is spend money in the caring part of their programme and reduce taxation to 20p in the pound. The right hon. Gentleman clearly has it in mind to forgo the first option.

The right hon. Gentleman also talked about inflation coming down. We must remember that the core rate—the rate about which the Government used to make a great deal—is not coming down anything like as fast. Sam Brittan pointed out today something that I had overlooked—that is, that last year's Red Book presented a graph of the core rate. The Government have now left out the core rate, because they know that it is the headline rate that will catch the popular imagination and, they hope, the support of the people at the next election.

On the medium-term financial strategy this year, page 9, paragraph 2.08, of the Red Book states:

"Like all the other larger countries within the ERM, the Government will continue to set a monetary target, and to take account of a range of other indicators of domestic monetary conditions. This approach helps to ensure that the ERM as a whole has a firm nominal anchor."

That is a reminder of the monetarist doctrine that we used to hear. The 1980-81 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" once said of inflation:

"It is to provide a firm basis for those expectations that the Government has announced its firm commitment to a progressive reduction in money supply growth."

The certainties of M3, as a result of the Red Book, are in effect laid to rest.

The Government say that it is the exchange rate that really matters. Of course we all know that, but if monetary targets are overrun, would that actually lead to a change of policy of any kind? If monetary targets are overrun by several per cent. or undershot by several per cent., will it lead to any change? Of course it will not. That is what exposes the nonsense of the monetarist position.

The economy is now run by the position of exchange rates in the ERM. Interest rates are determined, and the level of demand is a critical factor. Again, paragraph 207 on page 9 of the Red Book states:

"Membership of the ERM sets a new framework for monetary policy. Interest rate decisions must now be set consistently with keeping sterling within its announced bands . . . Interest rate convergence will follow inflation convergence. Both are likely to take time to achieve."

Interest rate convergence will not follow inflation convergence for some years.

The position in France is interesting. There, a level of inflation over several years has still not justified a level of interest rates comparable with those of Germany. Why is that? One can have a low level of inflation and still not have interest rates becoming alike. That is largely because France is still suspect, and the attitudes of investors have a long time lapse. The position is likely to remain the same with us. Convergence in interest rates is a long way ahead, and convergence in living standards is even further away.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I should have thought that memory of several devaluations gave rise to suspicion about the French currency. Thank goodness this country will not experience that under the new linkage system.

Mr. Sheldon: It is not the future that determines actions, but the past. We may have future hopes and expectations, but it is the past that matters. That is what has bedevilled France, and the same applies here. Because policy is once again being driven by our exchange rate, our economic management is now back to that of the early 1960s. We are back to old familiar territory. That is what we used to have when the old exchange rate determined so much of governmental economic policy.

I am not against fixed exchange rates; I am only against immutable exchange rates. The trouble with variable exchange rates is the uncertainty they offer to international

trade. We have seen fluctuations of 10 per cent. in some important currencies in a matter of weeks. Profits can be turned into losses. Allied Lyons lost £150 million as a result of currency fluctuations.

Hedging in the forward markets offers only limited security. It is far better every few years to have a substantial devaluation than to the 10 per cent. movement that we have seen in the dollar over the past few weeks. At any rate, for very long periods, the security of knowing what the exchange rate is can play a part in foreign trade.

When foreign trade was conducted by letters of credit with a fixed time for delivery and fixed and certain conditions, it was a secure way of trading. One could hedge in the forward markets. Now foreign trade shares many of the characteristics of internal trade within this country. Deliveries can be held up because of trading conditions, cancellations can result, and hedging in those conditions becomes very doubtful. I prefer fixed rates. If necessary, we could adjust them every few years. That would offer more stable conditions than we have in the present method of operation. Economic management has returned to exchange rates rather than the monetary nonsense which provided a foolish interlude.

It is likely that demand management will once again come into its own. We cannot have demand management without being able to use fiscal means of achieving it. We must control it in some way. By itself, interest is hopelessly inadequate—it is not enough. We need to be able to use several other means, and the obvious one is fiscal adjustments.

We used to have the purchase tax regulator, which was a marvellous instrument for being able to adjust demand management. We now have rather more cumbersome VAT changes, which always cause some concern. We have income tax and other taxes with which we can deal.

The financial memorandum of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, which we shall debate tomorrow, states that the cost of delaying the announcement of the change in the poll tax is £60 million. That is to pay town halls for the nonsensical way in which they produced all their bills only to put them in the shredder. That money was squandered because people wasted their time preparing and sending out bills for no purpose. It is the equivalent of Keynes's paying people to dig holes and fill them up again. I wish that other sectors of the economy had to resort to that.

We well understand that it is rare for a Minister to be selected by any Government for his or her administrative competence let alone for any ability in such matters, but it must have been obvious to everyone that every week that went by was a week in which expenditures were incurred and would prove to be wasted. While discussions were going on, bills were being prepared, to be thrown into the shredder. It is disgraceful that concern did not extend to people who were making decisions. We as taxpayers will pay for the administrative incompetence of the operation. Sixty million pounds—many people say that it is much more—would buy some hospitals, schools and other useful matters. What we are getting is frustration and waste paper. A great burden of responsibility falls on those who failed to take those matters into account.

Of course many Government expenditures are wasted. That is something with which we are all familiar. Fortunately, it is much rarer in our country for Governments to know that expenditures are being clocked up like a taxi cab meter—visible to all—while the Government make up their mind which course to take. A proper and contrite apology is needed.

The sleight of hand which reduced the poll tax, increased VAT. The Government are relying on the fact that VAT is less disliked than the poll tax. However, we can draw another conclusion—that VAT increases are more acceptable than the rundown of our transport systems, our schools and the health service. If that is so, the well publicised trade-off between taxation and expenditure does not have the relevance that the Government thought it had. Services have had to be cut to dangerously low levels in relation to what should be provided. Suddenly, an extra £5 billion has been made available, not for our transport systems, hospitals or schools and colleges, but to save the Government's face.

Years ago, we used to talk about people in eastern countries having to avoid saving face. However, the Government are more guilty than those eastern countries. The Government have been led into a blind alley by the persistence of a dominating personality in the previous Administration, and they are having to reconcile that with the present realities.

The Government will not find the solution. I do not agree with the solution suggested by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). The Government are going to have to try to fool the electorate, and I believe that they will be unsuccessful.

5.30 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I was delighted when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that he was going to present a Budget for business. I have always taken an interest in business and have particularly supported small businesses. No Government have done as much for small businesses as this Government over the past 10 years. Before 1979, small businesses were being squeezed by taxation and bureaucracy and we had one of the smallest small business sectors in Europe. Over the past 10 years, there has been an explosion of enterprise and initiative. It is clear from my rural, seaside constituency exactly what has been happening.

Of course small businesses are feeling the effects of the recession. That is why we particularly welcome the help that has been given to businesses, particularly with regard to helping cash flows. We also welcome the reductions in corporation tax and the raising of the level by a quarter, below which companies pay the 25 per cent. lower rate. The halving of the waiting period before firms can receive relief from bad debts is most acceptable; in particular, I am pleased that 700,000 small employers will now be able to pay their PAYE and national insurance contributions quarterly.

By persuading the European Community to allow us to raise the VAT threshold to £35,000, the Chancellor has achieved a success which previous Chancellors failed to achieve. A former Treasury Minister in the previous Labour Government told me last Friday that he had tried to persuade the EEC on that matter, and he was most complimentary about the Chancellor's success.

However, we must not become carried away. Those improvements are only costing the Exchequer in the first year some £630 million. Against that, we must offset the cost of NIC on company cars and benefits, which will bring in £550 million. I was a little disappointed that, in a

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Budget that was supposed to be for business, the Chancellor, in what I can only consider to be a petty act, decided to tax car telephones, and particularly fixed phones.

I have a business, and I do not give car phones to my representatives as a perk. I give them phones to make them more efficient. Car phones are like computers: they are part of the machinery and equipment that one needs in order to be more efficient. We always talk about our industry becoming more efficient. If the Chancellor is worried about portable phones disturbing his dinners in restaurants, perhaps he could compromise and at least exempt phones that are fitted to cars. I am sure that many executives and representatives do not like the fact that their bosses can reach them on a Sunday afternoon.

I was disappointed that the Chancellor did not go a little further to help the cash flow of really small businesses by accepting the proposal by small business organisations to allow the first £5,000 or £10,000 of retained profits in a business to be tax-free. That would have helped new small businesses and their cash flows.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), I thought that the overall Budget judgment was correct. Basically, it was neutral from a tax point of view, but there has been a slackening of the fiscal stance. There has been a move from a small Budget surplus this year to a deficit next year. That is to allow the automatic regulators to work. The deficit will help to allow the economy to recover from recession later this year.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was right to resist the temptation, particularly as we are moving towards a general election, of tax giveaways so that he could send a message to the markets that his first priority was to conquer inflation. More than anything else, business needs a reduction in interest rates. Clearly my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been successful in that regard. There has already been another 0.5 per cent. reduction, and I look forward to another 0.5 per cent. reduction within the next two weeks. However, we are really looking for interest rates to come down to 10 or 11 per cent. in the next two or three months.

It is only when one studies future years in the Red Book that one understands that fundamental changes have occurred in the Government's economic priorities. Only two years ago, the Government were forecasting a Budget surplus and proudly pronouncing that they were systematically paying off the national debt. It was forecast two years ago that, for the three years beginning 1990-91, there would be Budget surpluses amounting to £19 billion. This year's Red Book forecasts a Budget deficit for the same three years of just under £20 billion. That represents a turnround of about £39 billion.

I cannot believe that that enormous change is due simply to the recession and falling revenues. It is partly due to a failure to keep tight control on spending, particularly spending by local authorities, by the health service and by many other Departments. In two successive autumn statements, Government expenditure plans have been raised substantially. Unless we prevent that happening again and rigorously control public expenditure, we will have higher deficits in 1992-93 and 1993-94 than are forecast now in the Red Book, and we will not have a Budget surplus in the foreseeable future.

A rising national debt will be a clear sign of fundamental change in policy between this Administration and its predecessor headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I clarify what the hon. Gentleman has just said? Is he advising his constituents that he wants to see cuts in moneys to public services involving cuts in education, and in provision to the elderly and to the national health service? Is he saying that less money should be spent by the taxpayer on those very important services?

Mr. Townend: With respect, the hon. Gentleman seems to be obsessed with cuts. I am suggesting what my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby suggested. The increase in spending should not rise as quickly as it was rising before. It has been accelerating——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Townend: I am trying to respond to the hon. Gentleman. If he wants to intervene again, I will give way to him.

I believe in a balanced Budget. Obviously, if we believe in Budget deficits, there will be more money to spend in the short term, but in the long term when interest must be paid on the Budget deficits, less money will be available.

I must say—when I say this, I will probably be in the minority in the House, although not among my constituents—that it sticks in the throat that the Government, with a growing Budget deficit, are giving away £1·5 billion a year in overseas aid, which is contributing not only to the Budget deficit but to our balance of payments deficit as well.

The way in which the Chancellor committed himself to increased child benefit in future years gave me little confidence in the Government's determination to take tough decisions to keep spending down. All my experience of Government forecasting under all Governments in recent years leads me to believe that it will be a miracle if we have a balanced Budget by 1994-95.

If the Government are to have any chance of keeping to their spending targets, they will have to be far more successful than in the past in keeping public sector wage settlements down. The Government are always telling the private sector, "We must get our wage settlements down to the level of our EEC partners." Indeed, in his speech the Chancellor said:

"and come down they must, eventually, to the levels prevailing in other ERM countries. There is no escape route through devaluation, and firms know this." —*[Official Report,* 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 166]

I hope that the Government accept that. Would it be too much to ask the Government this year to set an example to the private sector in public sector settlements?

Another fundamental change in the Red Book is that, for the first time, there is no item under the heading "Fiscal Adjustments", which, as we all know, is another description for tax cuts. We had fiscal adjustments of £1 billion, £2 billion and £3 billion for the three years from 1990-91. I welcome the Government's aim to reduce the standard rate to 20p, which the Chancellor reiterated, but I cannot see any prospect of that in the next five years. Certainly the tone of the speeches of our new party

chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), makes me believe that increasing spending and benefits will be a greater priority than lowering taxes.

The main change in the Budget is the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax to fund the £140 per person reduction in the community charge. I welcome that, because it goes some way towards what I see as the only long-term solution to the problems of financing local government. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby on this.

The problem has dogged the Government since 1979. Although the Government have had considerable success in reducing Government expenditure in general and reducing the proportion of spending as a percentage of GDP, they have failed to control local authority expenditure similarly. About 10 Bills have been passed, changing the rate support grant, capping rates and introducing the community charge. Despite all that, spending has risen relentlessly, and the burden on the public has continued to increase. Labour councils have led the way, but, to be fair, many Conservative councils are not without blame.

Therefore, I have concluded that, with some notable exceptions, local authorities have failed the public in providing cost-effective and efficient services. Over wide areas, they have been profligate, overmanned and inefficient.

I speak as one who, for a considerable time, served in local government, including a spell as chairman of the finance committee of the old county borough of Hull and, subsequently, as leader of Humberside county council, where I managed to prevent rate increases being above the rate of inflation. What was significant in all that time was that never once did a chief officer come to me and say, "Mr. Leader" or "Mr. Chairman, I have found a way of doing the job cheaper, of reducing my budget or of reducing my staff." The only long-term solution is to remove major powers of taxation altogether from local government.

Local government should be responsible for providing services, making choices and fixing priorities within a budget provided by central Government. I differ from my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby in that I believe that 50 per cent. of the funding should come from VAT and 50 per cent. from income tax. It should be allocated on a simple per capita basis, unlike present Government grants, which are distributed according to dozens of different criteria which no one understands and most authorities claim are unfair.

I accept that, in the early years, additional block grants will have to be made to high-spending, inner-city authorities, but those grants can be phased out while authorities adjust their expenditure to the norm. Within that total, local government would have flexibility. However, so that authorities cannot wreck vital services and start sacking teachers and policemen every February because they run out of money, I would hand over the police, education and the fire service to central Government.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I, too, have been a long time in local government, but I have come to a different conclusion. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman suggest that 50 per cent. of local authority funding should come from VAT and 50 per cent. from income tax. I presume, therefore, that he intends no local contribution and none from the business rate. Does he advocate an increase in income tax?

Mr. Townend: Obviously, if one abolished the community charge and did not replace it with some other form of local taxation, and if one decided to fund local government expenditure from national taxation, one would increase income tax, just as VAT is to increase.

There are significant advantages in my proposal. First, it is simple and, secondly, it is economic. It would save £750 million a year, which is the cost of collecting the community charge. There will be a similar cost if we have a property tax. Moreover, my tax would be collectable and people would pay according to their earnings and expenditure.

I am afraid that, by going only halfway, the Government will have the worst of both worlds. They will continue to have many of the major problems of the community charge system, and the tax will be expensive to collect. If we have a property tax, whether based on capital values or rental values, it will have to be updated frequently, and revaluations will be expensive. Property is not an accurate measure of people's ability to pay. Whatever property tax we dream up, much of the unpopularity and unfairness of rates will apply. We shall have no more control over local government spending than we have now.

The Secretary of State for the Environment seems to believe in the myth that local government is popular, so we cannot remove its powers of taxation. If Ministers consider the experience gained at their surgeries, they will agree that local government is unpopular. People think that it spends too much. Eighty per cent. of my constituents come to my surgery when they should go to see a councillor, but do not know which one to see or even the councillor's name. The Secretary of State's proposals are consultative. I strongly urge the Government to consider the many advantages of going the whole way and solving the problem of local authority spending once and for all.

5.48 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): As a kindly man, I begin by seeking to protect the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). A few moments ago, when the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the former Chancellor who is just leaving the Chamber, suggested that the hon. Gentleman was an idiot and an ignoramus, I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was being uncharacteristically offensive. I have long since learnt in this Chamber that in economics the truth is in inverse proportion to what the right hon. Gentleman says. Therefore, any lingering doubts about this being a bad Budget immediately disappeared when the right hon. Gentleman said that it was a good Budget.

In the 19th century, the Conservative party was called the stupid party and to judge from the response of hon. Members to the Budget last Tuesday, it still is. The Chancellor of the Exchequer told us—the figures are in table 3.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" —that in 1991 domestic demand would fall by 2·75 per cent., fixed investment by 9·75 per cent., GDP by 2 per cent. and manufacturing output by 5 per cent. At that, Conservative Members waved their Order Papers and

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

cheered and cheered and cheered. Do Conservative Members really care so little for their country that they now gloat at catastrophe?

I suspect that the Budget of 1991 will be known as the "red Budget"—red for deficits, red for bankruptcies and red for the danger that it brings to the economy. In truly miraculous fashion, the Chancellor has put the British economy into the red, not only on our balance of payments account in the depth of a recession, but also back into the red on our income and expenditure account. When the Chancellor told us that he intended to move from public sector debt repayment to a public sector borrowing requirement of £8 billion this year and £12 billion next year—the true figures may be double that —it was miraculous to behold that he showed no sense of shame, guilt or contrition and no feelings of betrayal. Clearly, moving from virtue to vice causes no problems for our Chancellor.

But what of the true Tory worshippers, such as the hon. Member for Bridlington? What of the hon. Members who froze with disbelief as the Chancellor stripped aside the ideology of the Conservative party piece by piece and idea by idea? For the hon. Member for Bridlington, the members of the Bruges group and the Conservative Way Forward group, the questions are all too obvious. Whatever happened to the Thatcherite concept of thrift and the notion that a nation should not live beyond its means? Whatever made the Chancellor cast aside the concepts of fiscal integrity, fiduciary probity and financial rectitude? Where now is the concept of the balanced Budget that was resurrected in the 1980s from ancient times and placed on a pedestal by previous Chancellors as the essence of modern Toryism? How can the hon. Members who are now sniggering on the Conservative Back Benches and who told us in the great Tory slump of the early 1980s, "You can't spend your way out of recession," now tell us that that is precisely what they intend to do in the great Tory slump of the early 1990s?

I wonder whether there has ever been a politican to match our slippery Chancellor who, since being elected to the House, has slid easily from being a convinced Keynesian, to a convinced monetarist, to a convinced neo-monetarist, to now being a convinced neo-Keynesian. It is a bit like the Chancellor first assuring us that he believes in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, and then telling us that he also believes in Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. I dare say that I am being naive——

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Yes.

Mr. Sedgemore: I hear a word of assent from the Treasury Bench.

Perhaps at my age I should not be surprised that a Chancellor who has climbed the greasy pole of politics by expressing absolute devotion to all the policies of the former former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who then expressed absolute devotion to all the policies of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and who now expresses absolute devotion to all the policies of the current Prime Minister, should be feckless, feeble and fickle over the economy.

On one level and in this regard, the Chancellor reminds me of George Borrow, a man for whom expediency was to be preferred to principle, and who wrote:

"I am invariably of the politics of people at whose table I sit, or beneath whose roof I sleep".

On another level, and in respect of the Chancellor's disregard for economic principle and personal loyalty, he reminds me of that creature in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" who was described as a spotted snake with double tongue. Indeed, this morning's edition of *The Independent* reported:

"A Cabinet minister close to the Prime Minister said that Mr. Major had to proceed carefully to avoid 'grisly old figures rising up from the snake-pit and biting him'."

The Budget will certainly have bitterly disappointed those Conservative Members who had hoped that it might enable the Conservative party to match Labour as the party of low taxation—*[Laughter.]* I deliberately paused for the laughter, because this Budget leaves the Conservative party indelibly, if unenviably, the party of high taxation. That point is made not by me or by some Socialist academic in a polytechnic, but most eloquently by the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself in table 2A.2 of the Financial Statement.

I refer the two Conservative Members who sniggered in their ignorance to that table, which is headed "Non-North Sea taxes, social security contributions and the community charge as a per cent. of non-North Sea money GDP". I am sure that they know what that means. The table shows that in 1978-79 under Labour total taxes were 34·75 per cent. of GDP. However, it then shows those two ignorant sniggering Conservative Members that, in this tax year, total taxes will be significantly higher at 37·75 per cent. of GDP.

But it is even worse than that, because the table then shows that, under the Conservatives, total taxation will be significantly higher than under Labour in 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95. Those Conservative Members who are laughing and sniggering can learn from that that it is planned by this Government that taxation should be higher under the Conservatives than under Labour into eternity and, it seems, even beyond——

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): That is the essence of our taxation policies. We have been trying at great length to persuade the Labour party to agree that when the level of taxation on our population and the rate of income tax are reduced, more income is raised because the entrepreneurs and the enterprise society have been freed. That is the essence of our political beliefs.

Mr. Sedgemore: I knew that it was dangerous to give way to the hon. Gentleman and that he did not understand what I was saying. I was not talking about total taxation as a global figure, but about taxation as a proportion of GDP. The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. The reason the Government are spending so much money on public expenditure is the massive recession and the massive amounts of money that they are having to spend on social security benefits, including benefits for the unemployed who now number more than 2 million and who, according to most of the projections of serious City economists, will have increased by the end of the year to 3 million. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman goes away, picks up a copy of the Red Book and spends his weekend or the Easter holiday

reading it so that he will return better informed. If that does not help, I will give him some elementary economics lessons.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): While undertaking that study, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will remind himself that the public sector borrowing requirement for 1978-79 was 5 per cent. of GDP and that, if we were running such an irresponsible policy now, it would be nearly £40 billion.

Mr. Sedgemore: I do not want to go into the theology of the public sector borrowing requirement, but the hon. Gentleman would do well to be careful about whether there is a direct correlation between the public sector borrowing requirement and economic growth. If the hon. Gentleman studies the current figures for Germany, he will find that the public sector borrowing requirement there is roughly 5 per cent. of GDP and that economic growth is also approximately 5 per cent. What is wrong with economic growth in Germay with a public sector borrowing requirement of 5 per cent. of GDP and with economic growth of 5 per cent.?

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood) *rose*——

Mr. Sedgemore: I shall not give way, because I must get on. Mr. Speaker has intimated that we must push along a bit.

The Budget will also disappoint those Conservative Members who had hoped to see unemployment falling and manufacturing industry growing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has said, one reason why that will not happen is the lack of investment allowances and the paucity of tax incentives to achieve that end. However, another reason is that the Government and the country are still suffering from the serious mistakes that the Government made by entering the exchange rate mechanism at too high a parity. They did that because they used purchasing power parity theory rather than fundamental equilibrium exchange rate theory. The time has come for the Government to move to the narrow band and at the same time devalue to DM2·60 to the pound. If they were prepared to do that, they could not only have a rate of exchange which was sustainable in the longer term but reduce interest rates by 2 to 3 per cent. immediately.

While on the subject of Europe, hon. Members should reflect that, in his Budget speech, the Chancellor carefully avoided any reference to European monetary union or the creation of a single currency. I was not surprised, because 10 days ago I was in Germany and those who know about these things were telling me that the die is now firmly cast and the British Government have made it clear that they will join in European monetary union and agree to the creation of a single currency. I hope that some members of the Way Forward group and the Bruges group will comment on that. Indeed, I hope that the Minister, who is squinting away and perhaps does not know about these things, or whichever of his colleagues replies, will comment on it.

The poll tax has been described as the flagship of the Conservative party. When the flagship of passenger liners —the Titanic—sank, it did so because it hit an iceberg, most of which could not be seen. But when the flagship of the Tory party sank, it did so, not as a result of something that could not be foreseen but because of the damage caused by the mutiny of both the passengers and the crew, leading to the captain being thrown overboard.

Some people in this country do not want to see the poll tax go. In Finchley, Chingford, and Tewkesbury, Members of Parliament hold hands with their constituents in church and pray for the continuance of the poll tax, but my constituents in Hackney do not like the blasphemies of the way-out people of Finchley, Chingford or Tewkesbury. Nor do they like the heresy of the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has decided to replace one tax with three—a property tax, a poll tax, and a poll tax surcharge operated through VAT. Surely to God there should be a maxim in politics that where one tax will do, why have three? The one tax that we want is Labour's alternative. If I had to—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh. I am told that they are stealing our clothes, but I suspect that they may even come up with proposals similar to those of Labour by the autumn.

To sum up the Budget, we now have poll tax disarray, local government disarray, industrial disarray, employment disarray and macro-economic disarray. But we have an election coming shortly. When Labour wins that election, it will once again, as our document says, make us world class and take us into the third millenium with heads held high. Then we can rejoice.

6.3 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on an imaginative and in some respects surprising Budget. The Treasury Select Committee looks forward to taking evidence from the Governor of the Bank of England and Treasury officials tomorrow and from the Chancellor himself on Wednesday. I cannot anticipate what we shall eventually report, but we can endorse his action in not inhibiting the automatic stabilisers because we explicitly mentioned the importance of that in our report on the autumn statement. The level of public sector borrowing requirement that he projects is entirely appropriate against the background of recession that we face. That will assist in the recovery. I believe that at the same time we shall see a falling rate of inflation and possibly a corresponding fall in interest rates. That will also lead to renewed economic growth.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the centrepiece of the Budget, which was the switch in taxation away from local taxation to central Government taxation. I welcome that very much. None of us can envy a Leader of the Opposition who has to reply to a Chancellor's Budget at short notice, especially, as on this occasion and when selective employment tax was introduced, the more radical measures appear in the last few sentences of the Budget statement. Nevertheless, one might have thought that the Leader of the Opposition would have comprehended sufficiently the switch from one tax to another not to describe it as regressive. I found that extraordinary, because there is relief on VAT at the bottom end of the income scale, not least for food, fuel, transport and so on.

The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) said that we should not switch from fewer taxes to more taxes. When I had the somewhat unenviable task of steering the VAT legislation through all its stages in the House, we got rid of two taxes and

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

introduced one. We got rid of the dreaded selective employment tax and purchase tax and introduced VAT in a way that was not regressive.

In parenthesis, zero rating is an essential part of the structure of VAT. I understand that the negotiations on the zero rating of VAT within the EC will come to a head around May. I warn my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that it would be intolerable if we were compelled to give up zero rating. I hope that, if necessary, the Government will use the veto to avoid that. Zero rating is a fundamental aspect of our tax and our VAT has a much better structure than that of any other country in the EC. Zero rating must be maintained.

Putting the burden of taxation on to VAT will reduce the impact on those on lowest incomes. At the same time it is proposed to abolish the community charge which, except for those at the bottom end of the scale, who still pay nothing, is undoubtedly regressive. Therefore, for the Leader of the Opposition to say that the switch was regressive was extraordinary.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Did I understand the right hon. Member to say that those at the bottom end of the scale did not pay any poll tax?

Mr. Higgins: It depends on exactly how the adjustments are worked for refunds and so on. If that were not so, the argument of the Leader of the Opposition would be even less valid. In any event, the crucial point is that the changeover is not regressive. It is an advantage for those at the lower end of the income scale.

Some years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and I, when he was at the Department of the Environment and I was at the Treasury, introduced a Green Paper described as "The Future Shape of Local Government Finance." A draft was presented to us by our officials which was so diabolically bad that I rang my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley and said that we could not issue it. He agreed and we re-wrote the whole thing. I re-read it at lunchtime today and I must say that it is a remarkably good Green Paper.

It was clear from it that the rating system was open to substantial objections. It was said that people paid taxes in sorrow and the rates in anger. There was much to be said for that. We went through the alternatives in the Green Paper. We considered local income tax, local sales tax or value added tax, local employment and payroll taxes, motor fuel duty, super rates, surcharges on the rates, site value rating and so on. It was absolutely clear that there was no satisfactory or ideal alternative to the rating system.

In some respects, the community charge was an improvement on the rates. Many of us on the Conservative Benches have advanced the arguments in favour of it during the past two or three years. I came to the conclusion after the publication of the Green Paper that the only satisfactory answer was to transfer the entire cost of local government to the central Exchequer. I continue to hold that view, for several reasons. I shall give the arguments in favour of such a switch. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor went a long way in his Budget towards switching from local to central taxation, but he needs to go still further.

First, there is a substantial saving in collection costs —even more so under the community charge than under the rates—which means a substantial saving in resources. Another aspect of that argument is that there will be a substantial increase in unemployment among local government officials. One might view that with relative equanimity because it will be only a temporary phenomenon.

Secondly, the change could be carried out in a short period of time, not the time scale mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley who envisages a change from the community charge in 1993-94. Switching the whole cost to the central Exhequer and abolishing the community charge could be carried out in a short time, as the £140 rebate has shown.

Thirdly, it would have a significant impact, depending on the way in which the money was raised for the central Exchequer, on the retail prices index. That would help wage settlements, which is an important factor. Fourthly, it would give effective control over the totality of public expenditure which, from the point of view of economic management, has been a problem for many years under successive Governments.

I shall now deal with the question of how the money would be spent. I suggest that there should be a block grant so that each local authority would then have to make the difficult decision on what to spend the money and what its priorities should be with regard to expenditure. I leave open the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) about what functions it should cover.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose——*

Mr. Higgins: I should like to finish these points as I am putting forward the arguments in relation to transferring the entire cost.

The counter-arguments include that of accountability, but we must recognise that that has been seriously undermined by capping. In cases where accountability and overspending have been serious, central Government have intervened so that in practice the accountability argument has been significantly weakened.

However, we must recognise that the switch will mean an increase in other forms of central Government taxation, about which I wish to make two points. First, the wording of the statement made by my right hon. Friend on 21 March was overly subtle—I put it no stronger than that. It said:

> "For the coming year locally raised finance will fund 22 per cent. of local government expenditure, compared to 34 per cent. this year. And these figures are before the substantial benefits of rebates and the community charge reduction scheme."

It should read:

> "But these figures are before the substantial benefits of rebates and the community charge reduction scheme."

In that light, the amount being financed by local government taxation is down to 11 per cent. One reaches the conclusion that at some stage, given the cost of collection and all the other factors that I have mentioned, the game simply is not worth the candle. That is the important issue.

In a paragraph in his statement entitled "Finance" my right hon. Friend argued:

> "A local tax base is essential if there is to be any meaning to the concept of local government."

I feel bound to say that I have some doubts about that and I always have. The allocation of resources is every bit as important a democratic function as the determination of the total. At any rate, the current position confirms my view that the statement I have just quoted is not true. In Wandsworth no local taxation is being raised and in a number of other local authorities, the cost of collection is greater than the revenue which may be raised. The argument that a complete switch would mean the end of local democracy does not apply.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South) *rose*——

Mr. Higgins: It does not apply to Wandsworth and other districts.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman has made a particularly interesting point. He mentioned the generally reported view that in Wandsworth no one will have to pay anything. If he is correct about the inclusion in those figures of the existing rebate system, the only people to pay something will be those at the bottom of the heap—those who are so well off that they benefit from full rebates. That would be a true irony.

Mr. Higgins: The hon. Lady should look at the true figures in the Red Book. They do, indeed, reflect the true position. The figure is 11 per cent. or, as the Chancellor said, £7½ billion.

Mr. Lawson: £7½ billion.

Mr. Higgins: Seven and a quarter billion pounds—that is the magnitude of which we are talking. I believe that it leaves unanswered the way in which that money might be distributed among a wholy range of taxes that the Government have at their disposal, but the arguments must be considered very seriously.

Mr. Budgen: If a local authority believes that its grant is inadequate to take account of its special needs, how will it have an opportunity to increase its income? However attractive the scheme, it considerably diminishes the rights of local authorities.

Mr. Higgins: I do not deny that. It makes a significant difference.

Mr. Lawson: A lot of dodges would have to be eliminated, such as sale and lease-back schemes, but it would still be possible under this scheme—which, as my right hon. Friend is suggesting, is similar to my conclusion as a result of the shift in the Budget—for local authorities to be able to levy genuine charges and, of course, be able to levy rents on council houses.

Mr. Higgins: My right hon. Friend, who has great experience of these matters, makes a good point. Undoubtedly, the scope for local authorities to follow this or that expenditure plan would be severely curtailed. I do not deny that. I know only too well the difficulties of getting a grant allocation system which can be regarded as fair and which takes into account differing needs across the country. We are already facing that problem.

The overwhelming amount of revenue for local authorities now comes either from central Government or from the business rate. One only has to deduct 11 per cent. from 100 per cent. to realise the extent to which that is already the case. I welcome the suggestion of further consultation. Although I welcome the change outlined in the Budget, we are rapidly approaching the conclusion —which I reached many years ago—that a complete switch is probably the answer to the organisation of local government finance.

Clearly, the switch must be related at some stage to the structure of local government. Further consultations are taking place about whether there should be unitary authorities. In some parts of the country the conflict may be significant, especially if differing parties are in power at county and local level. In other parts of the country—such as in West Sussex, which is the most prudent county—where there is an efficient authority, the current arrangement with local authorities works perfectly well.

I make it clear that I oppose the idea that this issue should be decided by means of a referendum. That is inconsistent with the practice of the House, and the decision should naturally fall to the House. The points that I have made this afternoon deserve serious consideration.

6.18 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): First, I should like to pick up on some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). His argument is remarkable coming from a Conservative. He is looking forward to the day when all local government finance is centralised, in the case of England in Whitehall, and for Scotland in St. Andrew's house. What he said about the element of local democracy in distributing the grant given by Government and how it should be divided among services presupposes that the grant will be determined by someone in Whitehall taking a decision about the component parts and analysing the needs of each locality. That represents a denial of local democracy and a frightening degree of centralisation—especially coming from a Conservative Member.

I spent the weekend in the Shetland part of my constituency. The House will recall that, in his Budget statement, the Chancellor, referring to his native Shetland, said:

"The charge in Shetland will fall to under £1."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 181.]

That was following on from his community charge relief proposals. Given the right hon. Gentleman's great benevolence to his native parts, one might have thought that by the time I got to Shetland this weekend, people would have started putting aside the savings that they will make on the community charge to raise a monument to their native son.

Although there is genuine and natural pride that a son of Shetland has advanced to such high office in the land, I cannot honestly say that the right hon. Gentleman's measure was greeted with great enthusiasm. This week, the local paper—*The Shetland Times*—carries the headline,

"Town hall in chaos as Lamont cuts poll tax".

According to that newspaper, the acting chief executive of Shetland islands council

"found it difficult to determine the logic behind the Chancellor's decision."

He said:

"'At £750,000 it still costs the same to collect. The cost of collection is around £600,000. So whilst it may . . . have seemed reasonable to spend £600,000 to collect £3·2 million, it starts to get ridiculous when the total income in £750,000.'"

That underlines the great anomalies that will be found in many parts of the country, where vast sums will be spent to collect relatively small amounts.

[Mr. James Wallace]

It is also right to put on record the fact that, although the Chancellor referred to a poll tax of under £1—£2 in Orkney, the other part of my constituency—he conveniently ignored the water charge, which, in Scotland, is collected with the community charge. That will lead to a charge of £45 in Shetland and £55 in Orkney.

It has been drawn to my attention that, if the Chancellor had not announced the change, a fully rebated poll tax in Orkney would have been £28 plus £53 water charge—in other words, a total of £81. Now the total will be £55 for everyone—except people whose homes are not connected to mains water, who will no doubt be billed for £2. That means that the poorest will benefit from the measure to the tune of £26, while the best-off will benefit to the tune of £140. But rich and poor alike will have to buy their goods in the same place and face the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT on top of the additional petrol duty incurred in getting there.

In my constituency, as in many other rural areas, the cost of living is already very high. The rural Scotland prices survey published last summer by McKay consultants in Inverness showed that, taking into account food, housing, transport, services and other goods, the cost of living in Lerwick was some 7 per cent. higher than in Aberdeen, which, as I am sure the House will recognise, is not a particularly cheap place anyway. In a rural village in Shetland, the cost of living was 14·1 per cent. higher. Moreover, in remote parts of Shetland, transport costs were found to be 38·5 per cent. higher than in Aberdeen. The 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT and the increased petrol duty will have a considerable impact on those places.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will accept that there is an environmental argument for increasing duty on petrol, but if we are to take an environmental approach, it must allow for some discretion and for a distinction to be made between casual driving in a city and unnecessary driving in places where public transport is available, and essential driving in rural areas. That distinction has not been made; nor did the Chancellor take the opportunity to show some imagination about vehicle excise duty, which could have been varied to make it more economical to drive cars that consume less petrol. The Chancellor may seem to have shown great benevolence, but in fact people will have to pay considerably higher costs.

The Chancellor did little in terms of investing in the transport infrastructure. Freight charges have recently increased substantially in my constituency. As the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who is Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, said, £60 million-worth of taxpayers' money—the Government always like to remind us that it is our money, not theirs—is to be spent to write off the administrative costs incurred in destroying poll tax bills that have already been printed and in sending out notices cancelling bills already delivered—such as the bill delivered to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in Westminster. The northern isles need only about £1 milion to make their freight transport costs reasonable this year but we have been told that the money is not available. Yet two months later, the Government can find £60 million to dig themselves out of a hole of their own making.

The Scotch whisky industry is important both in my constituency and in Scotland as a whole. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise the industry's contribution to our economy and, not least, to our foreign earnings.

Mrs. Gorman: Oh, yes.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) will appreciate the contribution of the industry in terms not only of domestic consumption but of foreign earnings. If one accepts that there should be duty on products, one must accept the indexation of duty; but in spite of strong representations, an opportunity was missed in the Budget to alter the bias that discriminates against Scotch whisky vis-a-vis other alcoholic beverages and to introduce a maturation allowance. I accept that the main purpose of stock relief was never to benefit the Scotch whisky industry, but it was beneficial none the less, because the product has to mature over many years. The ending of stock relief damaged the industry's finances, and the introduction of a maturation allowance would seem to be a suitable way of doing something about that.

I want to refer to two other matters. On the first, some positive steps were taken in the Budget. On the second, little or nothing was done. The positive steps were in support for small businesses, and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge what has been done. A number of the steps taken have already been mentioned—particularly by the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). One of the most important developments is that the Chancellor has shown greater sensitivity to the needs of small businesses and a greater understanding of what small businesses are all about than his predecessors.

I well recall, following the Budget in which the 100 per cent. capital allowance was abandoned, drawing to Treasury Ministers' attention the impact that that would have on crofters, farmers and fishermen in my constituency. I was told that what they had lost because of that change, they would gain through the reduction in corporation tax. There was a complete failure to recognise the fact that self-employed people did not pay corporation tax.

There was a basic misunderstanding of what small business was about. I had the impression that the Government thought that small businesses were businesses with as many as 200 employees. In fact, we were talking about businesses employing as few as four or five people. In the present Budget, the Chancellor has shown a greater sensitivity to businesses in that category.

The sizeable increase in the VAT registration threshold, the relaxation of the bad debt provision and the help to cash flow through deferred PAYE and national insurance contributions are all welcome. Nevertheless, all the benefits given to business in the Budget—the changes in corporation tax and the other measures that I have mentioned—amount to less than the additional £1·6 billion which is to go to local authorities from the non-domestic rate.

That figure is in the Red Book, at table 6.7. When I asked the Secretary of State about that, he replied that businesses were now free from the uncertainty of having to deal with "irrational Labour councillors". Now the whole country is having to deal with a Conservative Government who have increased uniform business rates in England and Wales by 10·9 per cent. with effect from 1 April—next

week—at a time when the underlying rate of inflation is considerably less. If the Government had had any confidence in their anti-inflationary strategy, they would have known back in November that the rate of inflation would be considerably less than that.

One cannot consider the taxation of business just in terms of what the Chancellor announces on Budget day; one must consider general taxation policy. The local taxation of business is now in the Government's hands; if one considers that together with national taxation, it is clear that business will be taxed more heavily in the forthcoming financial year.

We have often suggested ways in which the Government could improve the uniform business rate through an extension of the transitional relief arrangements and by ensuring that that relief does not terminate if one moves premises. It almost defies rational thought that the Government can discourage a growing business from expanding into bigger premises while deterring a business in difficulty from contracting into smaller premises. The Government have, however, managed to do just that.

The financial position of small businesses will be eased by the reduction in interest rates. On Wednesday, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed stated how our party would ensure that interest rates not only came down, but were kept down through movement into the narrower band of the exchange rate mechanism and greater independence for the central bank.

We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that many businesses have already gone to the wall. In the past 12 months, a record number of companies have gone into liquidation. They are no longer around to benefit from the lower interest rates. Those company collapses, together with the growing number of redundancies referred to by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) mean that the current level of unemployment is 2 million and rising. Despite that, however, the Chancellor made little reference to unemployment in his Budget statement and, today, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry did not mention unemployment once.

Unemployment is not just another statistic. I am sure that we all recognise that there is a human dimension to it and that families suffer anxiety because of joblessness or the threat of it. It is regrettable that the Government have failed to address that.

My party has outlined measures that would reduce interest rates and help in the short term. In the longer term, however, we must recognise that improvements in education and training are vital. If we do not recognise that, we shall once again have important skill shortages at the height of a boom.

There was considerable banter between the Front Bench spokesmen on the validity of each side's statistics. I do not believe that either spokesmen would dare to deny the fact that, compared with our competitors in Europe, Japan and the United States, Britain is a poorly trained country, and in comparison with our competitors, there are fewer people in Britain with worthwhile skills. Despite that shortfall and rising unemployment, the training budget has been cut. I welcomed the modest sum for training that the Chancellor announced in the Budget, but it fades into insignificance compared to the cut of more than £250 million for the training budget.

It is worth while considering the aims and guarantees of the employment training programme. Those unemployed for six to 12 months among the 18-to-24 age group will receive help and that is important. Likewise, those who have been unemployed for more than two years in the 18-to-59 age group will receive help. But what about those who have been unemployed for between 13 and 24 months? What about those women who want to return to the work force? We have always been told that those women represent an important resource, but employment training will do nothing for them in the next 12 months. The Budget will do nothing to enhance child care arrangements, which would give women an opportunity to return to work.

Although the Government may claim that this is a Budget for business—I recognise that some proposals are a step in the right direction—I regret that the overall taxation of business will be heavier than last year. I also regret that there is nothing in the Budget that gives any sign of hope to the unemployed.

6.33 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was slightly disingenuous, as I am sure he knows. He referred to the £60 million cost of the alteration to the community charge. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about that, but he went on to say that Orkney and Shetland needed only £1 million for its transport infrastructure. If one extrapolates that sum on a per capita basis across the country, however, the hon. Gentleman is talking of an overall expenditure of about £1 billion: I should certainly want my constituents to be given equal consideration.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also referred to uncertainty; I too am concerned that the autumn statement, the Budget and general economic assessments, including adjustments to interest rates and the like, are based upon current economic statistics. The set of statistics published today differs greatly from last month's trade figures, because an extra £500 million has been allowed for invisibles. That adjustment has been made as a result of the revisions recently announced for the last two quarters of 1990. It does not make for sound economic policy when we have so many inaccurate economic statistics that are revised so regularly.

When the Prime Minister was Chancellor, in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he said:

"We have looked at some statistical changes. I am now considering what else we can do, though I have not yet reached conclusions, to improve the general statistical base."

He said that he had sought the advice of the director of the Central Statistical Office and that he awaited a paper from him

"as to what we might do to improve the general quantity and quality, particularly the quality, of economic statistics".

Following the then Chancellor's announcement in May, the CSO issued a report in December, the final paragraph of which stated:

"The programme of work we now have in hand, particularly the measures announced by the Chancellor, should enable us to make further improvements."

However, the report went on:

"The figures may therefore be subject to larger than normal revisions, although the largest changes are likely to be in the capital account."

I am not sure whether those two statements are natural sequiturs, and even in December it was clear that there was much work to be done.

[Mr. Robert Hayward]

On Tuesday the Chancellor said that one of the lessons that he had learnt from years of grappling with economic statistics was that it was

"difficult to be certain about the past, let alone the future."

—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 165.]

If that is so, it makes it almost impossible for a Chancellor to make any sensible judgments about a set of circumstances on which he is trying to come to a conclusion relating to what taxes should be raised and what interest rates should be allocated.

I press the Treasury to come to a rapid decision on the ways in which economic statistics could be more carefully considered, given the great inaccuracy of many of them. We had an example of that just 11 days ago when, according to the *Financial Times*, Britain's current account deficit for last year was

"a fifth less than originally estimated".

On the basis of such information, we may well keep interest rates too high for too long, or too low for too long. The same error that may overstate a trade imbalance may underestimate it. It is important to do something about those statistics.

"The Lex Column" of the same edition of the *Financial Times* said that the revision of the current account deficit

"serves as a reminder of the deplorable quality of a statistical series which has mesmirised the markets on and off for several years."

That underlines the fact that it is not just the Treasury that makes judgments that may turn out to be inaccurate but the financial markets that contribute so much to the country.

In terms of the revisions made last week, page 4 of the CSO report referred blandly to

"Errors and omissions in the fourth quarter, representing unidentified net inflows over the current and capital accounts, were 2·1 billion".

In itself, £2·1 billion is a substantial sum of money. That report continued:

"Errors and omissions in 1990 were £3·4 billion".

The CSO casually added in brackets

"(£15·2 billion in 1989)".

We cannot carry on with the Treasury or the City making judgments on the basis of figures that are as inaccurate as those cited in the CSO report appear to be. "Economic Trends" is published annually. However, the last time that the visible trade balance was published was in 1984, but in 1990, that figure was revised, six years after the event, by £587 million. They revised the invisible trade balance six years after the event by £466 million. That makes any attempt to guide the economy virtually impossible.

I have commented on the trade figures, but are other figures any better? Every month, the Department of Employment publishes the underlying increase in average earnings. It is currently given as 9·5 per cent. and the figure has hardly fluctuated in the past three or four years—it is always somewhere between 9 per cent. and 10·5 per cent.

I draw the attention of the House to a subsidiary set of figures within that index—construction earnings. Any hon. Member who talks to anyone in the construction industry will know that the industry is in a deeply depressed state and that thousands of workers in the construction industry have been laid off. Those who can get jobs are accepting pay rates which they would never have accepted during the building boom two years ago. According to the *Employment Gazette*, construction earnings have gone up by just under 10 per cent. in the past 12 months. What hon. Member can believe that figure if he has talked to construction workers in his constituency?

An article in the *Financial Times* dealing with CSO statistics stated:

"The Central Statistical Office said wages and salaries per unit of output rose at an annual rate of 10·7 per cent. in January compared with 11·9 per cent. in December.

That encouraging development on inflation comes in the wake of last week's unexpectedly bad producer-price data and ahead of the release of the retail prices index on Friday."

That quote made two points. First, one set of figures published at the same time as the *Employment Gazette*'s figures—which reveal virtually no change—showed a marked decrease in wage costs. It also referred to some producer price figures which most people do not believe.

When the community charge was introduced, the Government spent £1·3 billion on a transitional relief scheme, but it had no effect on the retail prices index, which makes no allowance for any rebate that an individual may receive. If people are not paying for something such as the community charge, it is ludicrous that no allowance should be made for that in the RPI. Everyone knows that enormous discounts are offered on air travel and holidays. Does the RPI take account of those discounts? The answer is no. It is ludicrous to have another set of statistics on which economic decisions are made which are so grossly distorted.

Talking of grossly distorted figures, I should like to pick up my earlier intervention about the Opposition's Budget calculations. When I challenged the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), he referred me to the comments last Wednesday by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) about how the Labour party's Budget would be costed. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury demolished the Labour party's calculations in great detail. Since then, a series of Opposition spokesmen have come to the Dispatch Box, not one of whom has challenged my right hon. and learned Friend's figures.

Mrs. Beckett: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I propose to demolish those figures comprehensively in my reply.

Mr. Hayward: I thank the hon. Lady for that clarification. I shall listen to her with interest.

Mr. Marlew: The hon. Gentleman has spent the last 10 minutes telling us that he has demolished the figures on which the Labour party based its economic calculations. If one takes cognisance of the hon. Gentleman's comments, how can one expect any hon. Member to put any weight on the Government's statistics?

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Gentleman has merged two points incorrectly: one was the series of indices on which I was commenting, and the other was the series of costings of Labour proposals. I await with interest the comments of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), and I shall certainly be in my place when she speaks.

I should like to pick up the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and others in suggesting abolition of certain charges. In the long run, I should like to see removal of two other aspects of the unnecessary masses of paperwork. That would benefit the country. I was disappointed that the Budget did

not do away with the road fund licence, although I was pleased that it was frozen. I hope that it will soon be abolished. I should also like the television licence fee to be done away with.

6.45 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Before the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) started on his party political point, I very much agreed with his comments about statistics. As he knows, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has done quite a lot of work on that point, trying to improve the Government's statistics. Part of the problem has been the way in which the economy has changed. With an open economy, it is difficult to collect statistics in the way that they were collected 10 or 15 years ago. There is another problem —in the early 1980s, we cut the resources for our statistical department. We should restore that funding. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have mentioned the problem.

This is a highly political Budget. As many hon. Members have said, by far the most important part of the 70-minute speech came in the last four minutes—the cuts in the poll tax and the increase in VAT to pay for them, or what my constituents call the "sting in the tail".

I wish to refer to the Government's efforts to extricate themselves from the poll tax fiasco, but first I shall comment on the Red Book. It is an excellent custom that the Red Book is published when the Chancellor makes his statement. This year there is a marked contrast between the Budget speech and the Red Book. In the Budget speech, there was an upbeat forecast of economic activity and a lot of talk about the recession being partly behind us, but one need only turn to table 3.1 of the Red Book—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) pointed out—to reveal the devastating figures: the 2 per cent. drop in output, the 5 per cent. drop in manufacturing output and the almost 10 per cent. drop in fixed investment for the coming year. Astonishingly, the decreases in manufacturing output and in investment were not mentioned by the Chancellor although, as even he had to admit, unemployment will continue to rise throughout 1991 and probably into 1992.

We are experiencing a severe recession which affects all parts of the economy and all regions. We do not have a small downturn. Output has been falling for not just two quarters but at least four quarters, and it could well fall in a fifth. By any standard, this is a big recession.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee predicted that the economy would be in recession. When the present Prime Minister was Chancellor and introduced his autumn statement in November, he talked about a period of "weak activity." When the Chancellor came to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service in, I think, December he spoke about the recession being "shallow and short-lived".

Why did the Government get it so wrong? First, there is no evidence that the Gulf war made matters substantially different. The Chief Secretary admitted as much to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service when he told it about the economic consequences of the Gulf war. Therefore, that cannot be used as an alibi. The Chancellor tries to imply that we are suffering because of a world recession, but that is not so. There is a slowdown in the United States, but it is expected to be short-lived and the Chancellor's expectations of a recovery in the British economy are partly predicated on a recovery in the American economy. He cannot pray that in aid as the reason why our economy is in such a state.

If the Chancellor had looked at page 23 of the Red Book, he would have seen that the Japanese and German economies will grow by 3 per cent. this year and that the economies of France and Italy are growing by 1·5 per cent. Ours is definitely the odd economy out. The recession cannot be said to be the natural effect of the economic cycle. Some Members have already suggested that, and no doubt we shall hear it during the election campaign. A slowdown after an upswing might be part of an economic cycle, but the problem in the United Kingdom is quite different, because it is a four quarters drop in output. That is not a slowdown but a severe and sharp recession.

The reasons for this state of affairs are simple. This is a home-grown recession which arose from the over-expansion of the economy in 1987-88. Before Conservative Members say that the Opposition wanted the economy to expand at that time, perhaps I could quote something that I said, odious though that may seem. In early 1988 I warned the Government about over-expanding the economy and said that they should not cut taxes, which they proceeded to do. The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) will know that in its Budget report of 1988 the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service warned the Government that they were over-expanding the economy. We were right to issue that warning.

When the economy got out of hand, Government ideology or dogma led them to believe that they could rely on interest rates alone and that there was no other way. They could not increase taxes, because they had promised to reduce them and to go on reducing them. The problem about relying on high interest rates to slow down the economy is that they are slow and rather perverse and in the end have a massive effect. First, they had an impact on the housing market, on the small business sector and on investment. The effect eventually spread to the high street and the consumer, and in the second half of 1990 the economy fell off a cliff. It is unwise to rely on interest rates alone.

Conservative Members may say that all other economies are using high interest rates, but they are not. They use all the weapons at their disposal in a way that the Government have not. Our economy is in massive recession, because, for a long time after over-expanding the economy, the Government relied on a single weapon.

We are in a massive recession and must find a way out of it. The Government say that three things will happen: first, that destocking will come to an end; secondly, that there will be a decline in inflation; and, thirdly, that the American economy will expand and things will get better some time in the second half of the year. So far, their forecasting has not been good and until they have been proved right I prefer to rely on the CBI and the banks, including the National Westminster bank. They expect some shallow recovery, to use the Chancellor's words, but do not expect it to happen quickly and certainly not until the end of 1991, perhaps in the third or fourth quarter.

I looked to the Budget for something to help recovery and assist investment, but I am afraid that, despite some useful minor measures, it contains no meaningful help for business. The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who, unlike some of his hon. Friends, knows something about business, said that sotto voce to the

[Mr. Giles Radice]

Government. In yesterday's *Sunday Telegraph* Mr. Gavin Davis, who is one of our advisers, said that the Government have followed a rather confused strategy.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): The hon. Gentleman is a covert Tory.

Mr. Radice: I occasionally read the Sunday Torygraph.

Mr. Davis said that there is a bit of a muddle about immediate help to firms with cash problems and boosting the long-term rate of return on successful investment. Insufficient resources do little for either. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said, the amount that the Budget gives to industry is dwarfed by the £2·2 billion that will have to be paid out in the uniform business rate and which is three times more than the corporation tax assistance.

The CBI rightly argued for a new incentive for manufacturing, but the Budget contains no such incentive. The CBI and the Labour party asked for major help for training, but the Budget contains no such help. There is no new help for employment, although one would have expected such help because even the Chancellor admits that unemployment will rise. There is no new help for the infrastructure. The Government are relying on small and slow-acting help for business and less overtly on the increase in the public sector borrowing requirement, which partly reflects allowing the automatic stabilisers to work during a recession. I welcome that. Finally, the Government rely on a wing and a prayer and put their trust in the recovery of the American economy, but that is too little and too late.

In reality, the Budget has nothing to do with any of those things. It is designed to get the Government out of the poll tax mess and nobody pretends otherwise. Speeches by Conservative Members have not been about the real economy or what is happening to it, but about how to get out of the poll tax mess. The Budget was the first half of the effort which, in theory, was completed by the statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment two days later. As everybody knows, that did not quite do the trick.

The Budget represents a major U-turn, because it advocates the transfer of local government to central Government fundings. That reverses many years of cuts in central Government subsidy, a policy that was opposed by the Labour party. The right hon. Member for Worthing argues that there should be no local taxation and that all should be financed by national taxation.

Mrs. Gorman: Hear, hear.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Lady says, "Hear, hear," but if she agrees with that, what is the point of having local government? Why not run the whole show from Whitehall, which is the argument advanced by some Conservative Members? If there is to be local government there must be some sort of local government taxation, as is the case in every other country in Europe. No other European country would dare suggest that everything should be financed centrally, because it is understood that that is a recipe for running everything from the centre. That might please the invisible people in the Box, but it should not please Members of Parliament, who should want something better and to take a broader view of democracy.

The increase in value added tax will also have an impact on inflation. When VAT was increased from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. in 1979, 4 per cent. was added to the retail prices index. This year's increase of 2·5 per cent.—from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent.—will add 1·2 per cent. to the RPI, although the Government point out that, if one takes into account the poll tax reduction, the RPI will fall.

The Government should start to look again, as they did all last year, at the underlying rate of inflation. When RPI was high last year, the Government said that mortgages and the poll tax should not be taken into account. However, Samuel Brittan points out in an interesting article in the *Financial Times* today that the underlying rate of inflation is not falling rapidly but has increased —and it is not predicted that it will fall much. Samuel Brittan is probably right when he says:

"Don't believe the coming plunge in the inflation rate." Perhaps hon. Members should bear that in mind.

The increase in VAT is the tip of the poll tax iceberg. That tax has helped to undermine the Government's public finances, which have been affected not only by recession. More than £10 billion was spent trying to persuade voters to love the poll tax, but unfortunately—or fortunately—that effort was a complete failure. The Government's attempts to extricate themselves from the poll tax have done them immense political damage, and will continue to do so.

It is a measure of the mess that the Government have made that the only large-scale item in the Budget is the £4·5 billion devoted to the switch from local to central taxation. I wish that those resources had been devoted instead to manufacturing investment, training, and the infrastructure. The fact that at a time of recession, when manufacturing output is contracting and investment is falling, the Government are devoting such massive resources to getting out of a mess of their own making speaks volumes about their priorities. This is not a Budget for business—it is a Budget to save the Government's skin. I predict that it will fail in that intention.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Between now and 9 o'clock, right hon. and hon. Members should limit their speeches to 10 minutes.

7.3 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on introducing what is mainly a neutral Budget—and I, like many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, am particularly pleased with the help that he has given to small businesses. I refer in particular to the reduction in corporation tax, the carrying back of losses for three years and the raising of the VAT threshold, which will take 150,000 businesses out of the orbit of VAT. I am delighted also that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will review VAT penalties, because in many cases they are draconian and should never have been introduced in the form that they were.

The new treatment of bad debts will also be welcomed by small businesses, which frequently suffer from cash flow problems. They may be profitable, but they find it difficult to get in their money. The time is fast approaching when it should be mandatory for debts that remain outstanding after the agreed credit period has expired to be subject to interest. After all, if one has an account with a large store such as Harrods, interest is automatically added if one

does not pay one's bill promptly. The imposition of interest would be a salutary lesson to companies that owe money to small businesses—as well as to Government Departments and local authorities, which are often extremely bad payers, waiting until the last minute before settling their accounts.

As to capital allowances, the provision for a 25 per cent. offset on a reducing basis means that a company will have to wait eight or nine years before it recoups its money. If one went for a straight 25 per cent. instead, the money would come back to the company within four years.

There have been four reductions in interest rates over the past few months, from 15 per cent. to 12·5 per cent., and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to exercise caution. If sterling is too low, it is essential to increase the base rate—drastically if need be—to boost its value. On the other side of the coin, if one is trying to produce a fall in interest rates, it is as well to test the water—which my right hon. Friend successfully did. Sterling remains strong against the dollar and the deutschmark.

One feature of the Budget that I regret is the pettifogging nonsense of assessing the value of a mobile telephone at £200—to produce a charge on the user of £50, if he pays tax at the standard rate. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend the Chancellor appreciates the importance of the mobile telephone as a business tool.

I am a director of a company that has representatives on the road who use mobile telephones—but that is not their choice. It is the employer who wants to be able to contact his staff—particularly in service industries, such as washing machine and central heating repairs. Mobile telephones allow employers easily to switch an engineer, for example, from one place to another. It is nonsense to tax the employee, when mobile telephones are really in the interests of employers.

If a mobile phone is used only for business, it is not taxable, but if it is used for only one private call, the tax falls due. Who is to decide the veracity of the representative who says, "I don't use the phone for private purposes"? Who is to monitor its usage? Will the employer have to scrutinise the monthly accounts to determine whether each and every call was made for business purposes? That would be bureaucratic and administrative nonsense.

I am certain that ordinary members of the staff in my office occasionally use the telephone there to make private calls, but they are not surcharged. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor would be well advised to remove that extra burden of a mobile phone tax on what are often one-man bands. We should not even have to move an amendment against that measure. As for mobile telephones in restaurants, if one goes to a decent restaurant, such as the restaurants that I normally go to, they are banned anyway. It is up to the restaurant owner to ban mobile telephones. I repeat that I hope my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will think and cancel the measure.

I accept that after this year child benefit will be indexed. However, consideration should be given to taxing child benefit, particularly as, from 6 April this year, a husband and wife will be assessed separately and consequently wives who have no income apart from child benefit will not have to pay tax. However, it is ludicrous to give tax-free child benefit to rich people who do not need it. My right hon. Friend should look again at that.

I welcome the Government's consistency on the community charge. I remind hon. Members that in his first or second Budget my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir. G. Howe) undertook a complete switch from direct to indirect taxation and that became Tory philosophy. He did that on the premise that it is better to tax spending than earnings. That is analogous to what has happened this year. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has put the emphasis on indirect taxation. The necessities of life are zero-rated for VAT. Heating, lighting, public transport and rent are all zero-rated, so the necessities of life are not affected by the increase in VAT. In that sense, VAT is, to a certain extent, a voluntary tax. That is the argument that we used in the 1980s and it holds today.

As I said earlier, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is to be congratulated on this neutral Budget. He has introduced many changes which I have not had time to discuss in the 10 minutes available to me—for instance, the help that he has given to charities. The Budget is very good, particularly as my right hon. Friend has been restrained this year and did not have much manoeuvrability, but he has stuck to the Government's philosophy. The prudent reductions in interest rates will continue and, as we have all said, as inflation comes down interest rates fall accordingly as night follows day. I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue on the course that he has set himself.

7.12 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Most Budgets are by their very nature short-term affairs, but this Budget takes the prize for short-termism. Indeed, it is little more than an attempt to construct a somewhat flimsy raft to which senior Ministers could cling as they frantically attempt to chart a rather meandering and zig-zag course between the Scylla of the recession and the Charybdis of the poll tax, both of which are monsters of their own creation, and it is a raft held together by nothing other than a collective ministerial fear of losing the general election and a cynical contempt for the good sense of the British electorate.

The other day, the chairman of the Tory party, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten)—a member of the Cabinet, although he does not have much of a Cabinet job—was reported to have said that the Tory party had won the economic argument in the 1980s. I had always thought that the right hon. Member for Bath was one of the more intelligent members of the Tory party, but to make a statement like that in view of the Government's economic record must mean either that Tory central office has already spongified his brain or that he did not believe what he was saying.

In 1979 the Tories came to power proclaiming what they saw as three fundamental economic aims—to defeat inflation; to transform the supply side of the economy, thereby increasing the efficient supply of goods and services; and to establish, as they saw it, sound public finances. Certainly inflation has not been defeated; it has hardly been dented. As the Red Book shows, over the 12 years between 1979 and 1991 the inflation rate in the United Kingdom, except for a period of two and a half years, has been consistently higher than the average rate for all the countries in the European exchange rate mechanism. It is higher here than in France or Germany. Last Thursday, the right hon. Member for Bath was reported as having said that inflation would now fall like a stone; he said that—poor fellow—just a few hours before the latest RPI figures were announced, showing a fall of

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

0·01 per cent. in the retail prices index, and the underlying rate of inflation had actually gone up. Last week was not a good week for the chairman of the Tory party.

The hope now is that inflation, as measured by the RPI, will fall to something like 4 per cent. by the end of this calendar year—that is, by the end of December 1991. That may happen, but I have my doubts, as do professional commentators such as Sam Brittan and others. But even if it falls to 4 per cent. by the end of the year, the fall will owe more to the quirkiness of the RPI than to any real fall in the underlying rate of inflation. The Treasury's own Red Book forecasts for the financial year to April 1992 an average underlying rate of inflation as measured by the GDP deflator—as good a measurement as any—an average underlying rate of inflation of 7 per cent., and in one of the worst recessions that Britain has faced since the end of the second world war.

The second aim of the Tory party in 1979 was to transform the supply side of the economy. The reality has been a disastrous failure. Between 1979 and 1991 the average annual rate of growth of the British economy was a miserable 1·8 per cent.—the worst record in western Europe and a worse record than that of the ideologically despised 1970s. Despite the reduction in the top rate of income tax to 40 per cent., the amelioration of capital taxes such as inheritance tax and capital gains tax, and despite deregulation and privatisation, all that the Shi'ite fundamentalists of the radical right have to show for the 1980s is high inflation and a disastrously low rate of growth.

In 1979 we had a surplus on our foreign trade in manufactured goods. In 1989, after 10 years of Tory supply side economics, that suplus had become a massive deficit of £17 billion. Last year it was still £11 billion, and the forecast in the Red Book for the coming year is for a deficit of £6 billion. As the Treasury candidly points out on page 33 of the Red Book, however, that fall in the deficit to £6 billion in manufacturing goods is the result of lower domestic demand and has nothing to do with the transformation of the supply side of the economy. If the recession recedes, as it might, and if interest rates start to come down and demand starts to increase, the deficit in our manufacturing trade will go up from £6 billion. I believe that it will go up to levels which will become unsustainable.

Finally, we come to the public finances. Once upon a time, we are told, a terrible dragon roamed the land, devouring the crops and terrorising the people, and it was called the public sector borrowing requirement or PSBR. As the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) hinted, it was slain in 1984 or 1985—or perhaps it was 1986—much to the jubilation of members of the Institute of Economic Affairs and others. But the people, apparently were indifferent, and the crops were still destroyed. The dragon was changed by the nice PSDR—the public sector debt repayment—and the radical right slept soundly in their beds, but now they are beginning to wake up, as we heard from the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), and to form groups. And they are beginning to get very worried because the dragon is coming back—the PSBR is with us again. It may be said that it is only £8 billion for this year, which is nothing really.

One is reminded of the argument about the balance of payments that we heard from the right hon. Member for Blaby—that it does not matter, and even if it did, it would be all right if it could be funded. If privatisation proceeds for this year were taken out, the £8 billion would become £12 billion. In any case, I do not believe the figure of £8 billion, and I do not think that the Chancellor or anyone else believes it. I do not know about the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Perhaps he should go into the Chancellor's room one night and look through the secret drawers in his big desk, where the worst-case estimates—perhaps event the middle-case estimates—for the PSBR lie.

Even on the basis of the present public expenditure figures, the general view in the City is that the figure will be about £12 billion. I agree with that view. Even the Red Book points out that there is a margin of error of about £6 billion. But if the public expenditure totals are eroded, as they may very well be, the figure may go above £12 billion. In the following year it will be far higher because, if I may mix my metaphors, one cannot turn around the great tanker of the PSBR in one year. As the balanced Budget fades away, the PSBR will increase.

The old wheel has come full circle. Inflation has not been defeated, the supply side has not been transformed, and the public finances are in deficit. On its economic record alone—never mind its aims and, indeed, its achievements—the Tory party does not deserve to be re-elected, and after the antics of last week it will not be re-elected.

7.23 pm

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): The speeches from the Opposition Benches—in this respect, outstandingly introduced by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—have demonstrated intellectual arrogance that is absolutely breathtaking and delight in the difficulties of this country that is deeply depressing. Opposition Members have once again demonstrated dramatically that they have learnt nothing and have forgotten nothing. If the country really is in the difficulties that the Opposition attempt to portray, it is certain that the British people will not trust Labour to bring it out of those difficulties. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) would try to take us back into debt.

When the present Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee—the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon)—was in government, his was the one voice of righteousness that I admired, but he has been longingly harking back to the purchase tax as a regulator of businesses. The right hon. Gentleman welcomed fixed exhange rates, but only for an interval until a Labour Government could devalue once again.

I welcome the general thrust of my right hon. Friend's Budget. In particular, I welcome the move from direct taxes to indirect taxes. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), I believe that that will provide a more equitable and sensible basis for taxation. Because of lack of time, I shall not go down the road of local government finance, but I have to say that I agree very much with the conclusion of those who say that central Government must do and pay for what it wants at

the local level, while local government must raise the money that it wants to spend. That is the way to achieve proper accountability.

The fact that the Labour party has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing is illustrated in the motor industry. I am glad that in recent weeks my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have paid tribute to that industry for the investment that it has undertaken. That investment will result in the doubling of this country's production capacity by 1994. My right hon. Friends paid tribute to the industry also for its increased skill levels, for imbalance quality, and for achieving a significant reduction in the imbalance of trade in manufactured goods. Despite the difficulties, to which the Labour party continually draws attention, it is significant that the motor industry has maintained production by increasing exports.

Mr. Radice: Nissan?

Sir Hal Miller: Those are British jobs. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), who comes from the north-east, should object to inward investment, which has provided jobs and quality and has resulted in exports from the area.

It was interesting to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry say that he did not believe in different tax regimes for different industries. In that case, why do we have the special car tax—a tax unique to the motor industry and exacerbated by the increase in VAT? Value added tax is grossed up on the special car tax, making it far more than 17·5 per cent., and resulting in one of the highest rates of taxation on motor vehicles in the Common Market. In view of the tributes that have been paid to the motor industry, I wonder how that can be justified. This industry is the goose that has been laying the golden eggs. If the Government persist in selecting it for increased taxation, they may succeed in killing the goose.

As for taxation on company cars, I must say that there is no justification, in terms of the environment or of equity, for increasing the scale charges above the rate of inflation. The rate proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is double the rate of inflation. In conversations that I have had with the Treasury over the past four years, it has been established that the scale charges represent the arm's-length cost of providing a car, as measured against contract hire rates. In many firms, the company car is a tool of the trade. The employee will now be taxed at a higher rate than the self-employed person under schedule D. Nor is the proposal environmentally satisfactory. Newer cars are cleaner and lead to an improvement in the environment.

My right hon. Friend could have done more to improve the environment. He could have given teeth to the statement of principle in the White Paper issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment by introducing a differential in favour of diesel fuel and of vehicles powered by diesel engines. That might have been done in the scale charges, by the special car tax or by the vehicle excise duty. It should certainly have been done by introducing a differential in the hydrocarbon tax on diesel fuel, which was previously introduced for unleaded fuel.

Nor is there any reason in equity why employment of workers in respect of company cars be penalised by the national insurance contribution provisions for the provision of fuel. I am not aware that that happens in the provision of tools to any other worker or with the provision of free coal for miners. Why is the motor industry being singled out once again as the milch cow of taxation to support the rest of the Government's expenditure plans?

The motor industry has been singled out for increased taxation at a time when it is contributing signally to the reduction of the trade imbalance in manufactured goods. It is demonstrating increased investment, sustained output and increases in skills and quality. These are all the objectives that the Government are trying to achieve, and the motor industry is achieving them. It is doing so despite the Opposition's attacks. Why has it been singled out as I have described? I look forward with interest to the reply of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

7.31 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I do not understand how the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) can attack Opposition Members, who have defended the motor industry when it was in need of defence. We have advocated investment in the industry. It is especially difficult to understand how such an attack could have come from someone who was in favour of Jaguar being hived off as a route to its being a world success. Jaguar is now part of a multinational company that is having to plough in a great deal of money to sustain it. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has not learnt from the bitter experiences of our motor industry under the Government. Indeed, Conservative Members have learnt nothing.

Sir Hal Miller: The industry is a success.

Mr. Hoyle: If it represents success, I should not like to see failure. The industry is experiencing serious difficulties, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. It is doing so because of the difficulties of the market. The hon. Gentleman is right that the Budget will do nothing except add to the industry's difficulties.

We listened this afternoon to another lacklustre performance from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who opened the debate. One wonders for how much longer he will remain in his present position.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): The right hon. Gentleman is unemployable.

Mr. Hoyle: It would be better if he were made unemployed immediately. It will not be long before unemployment comes to him. He is now outside the main stream of his party and the policies that it is following. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about his knowledge and the knowledge of his departmental team, of industry. He would not know a manufacturing plant if he fell over one. He talked about decisions being taken by production directors and marketing managers. When did he last talk to production directors and marketing managers? There are many industrialists and executives who would like to be able to talk to the Secretary of State.

The Budget will only tinker with the problems that face the nation. It will do nothing for the ills that have befallen industry. It will do nothing for investment, output, the balance of payments and jobs. When the Secretary of State was boasting about increased investment, I wondered where he had been. Had he been dreaming about such

[Mr. Hoyle]

investment? There has been no net increase in investment since 1980; indeed, there has been a shortfall in investment since 1979. Even the Government's forecasts show that there will be another 10 per cent. fall in investment. That is the way to disaster, not success.

Output has been falling. It reached its low point in April 1990 and it has fallen every month since then. Where is the success story to be found in output?

Last year, the balance of payments was £13 billion in deficit. Despite all the suffering this year from high interest rates, record levels of bankruptcy, rising unemployment and joining the exchange rate mechanism—we joined it at the wrong figure, which makes life difficult for British industry and export markets—the balance of payments is still running at a deficit of £12 billion. The Economic Secretary shakes his head, but the deficit will not improve. Indeed, it will become worse. That is a fact.

Training should be the Government's flagship. Instead of that, 50 per cent. of workers in British industry have never received any training. A third of them have no qualifications. Few firms are planning to introduce any training. The Government rely solely on the training and enterprise councils. They intend to move training from the public to the private sector. In February, an article in the *Manchester Evening News*, which is not well known as a Labour party newspaper, said this:

"Whether direction from British industry, which has one of the worst training records in the West, will bring new impetus to training is open to doubt."

That is an understatement. We can be certain that TECs will be no substitute for the previous approach to training. That form of training has been the backbone of the success of the German and Japanese economies.

The Budget contains no provisions that will create more jobs. Unemployment will continue to rise. Shortly after the Budget statement, and very soon after 5,000 jobs were lost at British Shipbuilders at Barrow, 4,700 jobs were lost in the aerospace industry. That loss was announced on Thursday. It seems that there is no end to the recession. In the north-west, one in three manufacturing jobs has been destroyed since the Government came to office.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove talked about the success of the motor industry, but the motor car division of Rolls-Royce in Crewe is in serious trouble. The division of DAF that produces trucks at Leyland is in serious trouble. The shipbuilding division at Cammell Laird is also in trouble. I have already mentioned the trouble at Barrow. Under this Government, the textile industry has been in perpetual trouble. If something is not done rapidly for the textile industry, we shall not have one.

The Government have produced no strategy to aid the companies that are engaged in producing defence equipment. There are more redundancies to come, but the Government have introduced no policy to enable the companies to create civilian jobs. As a result, we shall lose design teams and skilled engineers. That will bring misery to the families of those concerned and adversely affect the nation's economy.

We cannot expect any help from the Department of Trade and Industry. What are the Secretary of State and his Ministers? I suppose that the answer is the horsemen of the apocalypse. They are destroying British industry. That is not surprising because the ministerial team of the Department believes totally in free market forces. Those Ministers do not belong to the mainstream of the Tory party. I believe that they are all members of the No Turning Back group. No doubt they have already submitted their applications to the Conservative Way Forward group. I wonder how much longer the Secretary of State and his Ministers will stay in office. The danger is that they fiddle while industry is destroyed. British industry has no future as long as the Tory Government remain in office.

7.49 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): As suggested by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), I have been in my constituency this weekend talking to the people and finding out what they think about the Budget and the other changes that were proposed last week. I promised that, given the opportunity, I would not tell the House my views on those issues but would report back to the Treasury spokesmen about what the people in Billericay and Thurrock think, and which of the topics that were raised last week they dislike most.

Their comments filled me with trepidation because I thought that, as a Back Bencher, my speech would lose me brownie points. However, having heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and one or two others, state their views on the community charge and its future, I am encouraged to add to that the opinion of most of the people to whom I spoke in Billericay.

My constituents feel that, if we are to have a different system, the Government should change it completely to central taxation. They are fed up to the back teeth with the high-spending Labour councils of Basildon and Thurrock, which keep adding to my constituents' costs in exchange for no real benefits at all. They think that, if central taxation takes over the small proportion still collected locally, central Government will be able to exercise some control over local government spending, which is what is required. Therefore, I am pleased to add my support to the view that has already been expressed several times this afternoon. It also means that I need not waste too much of my precious 10 minutes repeating that view.

My constituents were pleased about the measures for small businesses. Small business is big business in Billericay. It is a testimony to the success of the Government's economic policies in the past 10 years that, in parts of my constituency, jobs still chase people. New enterprises are opening, work is increasing and people are moving into the district simply because there are jobs and houses are still being built. Many new estates are going up and properties are reasonably priced, so people are attracted to the area. In Billericay, one does not have the gloomy view of the economy that is sometimes expressed in the House.

My constituents were, however, exercised by some of the small details in the Budget, particularly the daft idea of taxing portable telephones. They do not regard portable telephones as a luxury but as a tool of the trade which, although irritating to people in posh restaurants, are now a necessity. I sincerely hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will reconsider taxing portable telephones. If we are to tax things that irritate us, perhaps we should tax walkmen, karaoke machines in pubs and one-armed

bandits. Personally, I find men with facial hair irritating—to say nothing of social workers, who irritate me enormously—so perhaps we should tax them too.

Mr. Maples: Those are no doubt annoying things, but the difference between them and mobile phones, which we propose to tax, is that they are not provided by employers.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend. However, employers pay the tax on cars for their employees, which is only £100 a year. The tax on mobile phones is likely to be twice as much. I should not like to be without my little car phone, which is important to help me keep in touch.

My constituents were pleased about the measures to relieve small businesses of many VAT problems. VAT has always been a major bugbear for small businesses. When I was chairman of the Alliance of Small Firms, the Government's report "Burdens of Business" said that VAT was the main problem. I always felt that the Keith committee, which added enormously to the penalty, was a positive disgrace. I am glad that the penalties for late payment are being relaxed, although they will have to be relaxed a great deal more before my constituents are pleased. Nevertheless, the Government have taken some steps in the right direction.

Women members of my constituency had interesting views on the measures relating to child care. In addition to going to my constituency at the weekend, I also gave speeches to women audiences in Spalding and Cambridge. They were disappointed that the Budget did not do more to help working women. The Budget discussion today is about work and the success of our economy. One of the great successes of the Conservative Government is that they have not only changed but modernised the economy. We have moved away from the old, heavy industrial occupations to light industry, service industries and information technology, all of which are highly attractive to and make great demands on the labour of women. It is a growth area for which women, with their high level of dextrous manual skills and their ability to handle half a dozen problems at the same time, are very much in demand.

Half the work force now consists of women, but women have a dual responsibility—they are responsible for their families as well as their jobs. They are good at juggling problems, but they have to pay for help in the home while they are out at work. Whether they look after children or elderly relatives, the cost of help is now much higher than it was. Women were hoping that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would develop the theme in the last Budget and allow tax deduction on the cost of providing nursery provision at the workplace. The majority of working women do not have small children of nursery age, but children of school age. One working woman in two has a child at school and has to cope with the problem of what to do with the children first thing in the morning, what to do if they cannot get home when school closes in the evening, and what to do in the school holidays. They often have to pay to resolve those problems. Many women work part time and, once they have been taxed, the cost of care gobbles up so much of their earnings that they are hardly worth while.

Those women work not to buy lipstick and tights but to supplement the family budget, to help pay the mortgage, and to help keep elderly relatives. They look to the Chancellor in the next Budget—I am getting in my fourpenn'orth now—to assist those women, and I strongly recommend such a change. Today the Labour party threatened us with the idea of a Ministry for women, should Labour ever be elected. Such a Ministry would be the kiss of death for women.

To see whether a Ministry has ever done us any good, we have only to consider existing Ministries. We have a Ministry of education and large numbers of illiterate and innumerate children; we have a Ministry of housing and people sleeping on the streets; we have a Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers are fed up to the back teeth with it; we have a Ministry of Transport, but trains do not run on time and tubes are packed.

All the evidence points to the fact that a Ministry is not the way to proceed. The only people who would be pleased at the Labour party suggestion are misogynists. That does not mean that women's votes are not extremely important to us, and we should include measures in our financial strategy that will appeal to those people—not just because they are women, but because they form a significant part of our work force and play a dual role.

Overall, the Budget has been well received in my constituency. Short of reducing the tax base rate to 10 per cent., which I know is coming in the not too distant future, I am sure that the feeling in my constituency is that the Government are continuing to run a strong, healthy economy and that, in Billericay, things have not only got better throughout the period of the Conservative Government, but continue to do so.

I promised my constituents that I would come back to give that message to the Treasury spokesmen today. We are not the gloom and doom organisation that people would believe us to be if they listened to what Labour Members have to say about our economy and our country, which they are always rubbishing.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The Chair is grateful to hon. Members for observing the 10-minute limit. As a number of hon. Members who were hoping to speak are not now in the Chamber, it is possible for me to relax the limit. However, that does not mean that we should have very long speeches.

7.52 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) is not in the Chamber, but I believe that there is still an hon. Member from the west midlands who has a car constituency. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove said that Tories in the west midlands have failed to protect the car industry. The Budget was disastrous for the car industry and the west midlands.

Although cars are not made in Carlisle, we have a large tyre factory and a seat belt factory, both of which are foreign-owned—one American, the other Italian. We are grateful to those countries. We are also grateful that the Japanese have opened a car factory in the north-east and are to open another one in Derbyshire. Ironically, the Japanese have decided to do so in two good Labour districts in Derbyshire and the north-east, not in Essex. As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) said, success in the car industry will come when Rover opens a car factory in Japan. I want British industry

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to be the best in the world, but the problem is that the Tories are content for it to be third-rate, which is what the Budget will make it.

It is only six days ago that the Chancellor made his Budget statement, but it is easy to forget what he said, not because of the way he said it, but because of its content——

Mr. Hoyle: It was also the way he said it.

Mr. Martlew: Yes, but I was trying to be nice.

The Budget speech was irrelevant until the last four minutes out of 70. The rest of it will have been forgotten and put in the dustbin. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman decided to increase VAT to 17·5 per cent. as a means to get rid of the poll tax has ensured that the Budget will be a footnote in history. That is what the Budget was about; it was not about helping industry or women, or improving training standards: it was all about trying to fix the poll tax.

Conservative Members left the Chamber as happy as sandboys last Tuesday. They were whistling and jumping, and on the telephone to the papers telling them how great the Budget was. I did not realise that they were the same people when they came through Central Lobby today. They were as miserable as sin; they must have been back to their constituencies and seen the *Daily Express*. The Budget was about fixing the poll tax, but the Chancellor blew it; the people of this country cannot be bought that easily. They are not fooled; they saw the reversal of policies that have been going since 1979—discrediting the rates by pulling away what used to be called the rate support grant. In my constituency in the late 1970s, that grant was nearly 70 per cent. of total spend, but recently, until the Budget change, it was only 40 per cent. The Conservative Government pulled away that grant and gave it to people in income tax cuts. One Conservative Budget contained a correlation between the 2p taken off income tax and the amount taken from the rate support grant.

Up and down the country, in Labour and Conservative authorities, people saw services deteriorating, cuts being made and the rates going up. In this Chamber, Conservative Members have made some disgraceful comments about local councillors—one would not think that they were members of the same party. They have not had a good word for them. I have spent 18 years in local government and, believe me, we run the county council better than the Government run the country—they are a shambles, and should resign. We have had a "quick fix" Budget, which was all about trying to fix the poll tax—and it did not work.

We have heard people talk about a Budget for business —what nonsense. The Chancellor decided to take 1 per cent. off corporation tax. The Government have done a grand job of reducing the tax bills of companies. Some of those bills have been reduced by 50 per cent. or even 90 per cent. in the past year. Some companies do not pay any tax. That is not due to fiscal policies, but because of how the Government have run the economy. The recession is reducing the tax bills of companies up and down Britain because they have not made profits due to the way the Government run the economy.

I do not believe that those business men who have gone bankrupt will have thought a great deal about the Budget, which will have been academic for them. People who lost their jobs during the last recession under this Government were conned into the enterprise culture by smart advertising by the Department of Trade and Industry, but then interest rates suddenly went up, the Government abandoned them and they went bankrupt.

Such business men not only lost the business, and often the status that goes with it, but many of them lost their houses. As I mentioned in a previous speech, in the local paper I see births, deaths and bankruptcies. The paper lists a former builder who used to live in a nice district of my constituency, who has been rehoused by the local authority. That is the measure of what the Government's recession is doing.

However, the real blow to business did not come in the Budget, which did not really matter. Business men were looking for a substantial cut in interest rates. What did the Government do? As they had another performance to give on Thursday, they held back on the reduction in interest rates until Friday, when they took them down half a per cent., which had already been discounted. That will not bring down the mortgage rate or save the bankruptcies. That is an absolute disgrace, the Government know it, and this weekend local business men told them that it was a disgrace.

I do not believe that the only thing that they jumped up and down about in Billericay was mobile telephones. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) must have talked to strange people if that was the only problem they had with the Budget. That was not what I was hearing from my local business people in Carlisle, who were asking, "When will the penal interest rates come down? When will the Government stop playing cat and mouse with people's jobs?" That is what they are doing; they have brought down interest rates by half a per cent. and will probably bring them down by another half a per cent. before the local elections, just as they brought them down when we entered the ERM. They did so for political reasons that have nothing to do with the economy, and that is a disgrace. *[Laughter.]*

I hope that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will stop laughing when I start talking about unemployment. It is not funny, and the sooner he is unemployed, the better for the country. There are 2 million unemployed now, and Government statistics, drawn up by independent experts, show that the number is heading for 3 million next year. The Government have not even introduced any decent training schemes.

I visited a local training scheme on Friday in a company that had come out of the public sector—where it worked for the county council—and was now in the private sector. It is being severely hit by the recession. Employment training is dead in the water. We never appreciated the scheme, because it was compulsory, with only a £10 supplement for those on it. The Government have not raised that £10 in two years, but the present inflation rate means that it must be raised. As I said, employment training is dead in the water. The Government have abandoned it—it is another wasted scheme. Unfortunately, many people will suffer.

The Government's cynical logic is that, if we are to have 3 million unemployed, there will be no jobs anyhow, so we should not waste money on training. The Government should have taken the opportunity to provide real training

for real skills. The least we asked for was the reintroduction of a community project to give some hope to some people in the short term until the recession is over. They have been abandoned by the Government in an effort to fix the poll tax.

The Tory Government have abandoned everything. They abandoned their former leader and the poll tax. I now hear rumours that they are not too happy with their present leader; but we are very happy with him.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We backed the "No Turning Back" group.

Mr. Martlew: It is not the "No Turning Back" group; it is the "Don't Know Which Way to Turn" group. Why do we not have emergency measures to reduce unemployment? The Government promised to build a hospital in my constituency in 1979. The plans were drawn up, and a bypass could have gone around the outskirts of Carlisle and done some major good. However, the Government are not prepared to spend money to achieve a substantial reduction in unemployment.

We all know that the first part of the economy to recover is the construction sector. Hon. Members have heard the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) talk about unemployment in the construction industry. A commitment to build a better infrastructure and more national health service hospitals would be beneficial. I realise that other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You are doing very well, Eric.

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) for asking me to continue. I should not want to get in his way. I know that he has the same problem in his constituency.

In Cumbria, for example, we have problems with Barrow and Vickers. That town exists because 14,000 people were employed in the shipyards. It was obvious that there would be a decline in Barrow when the Trident programme came to an end. The Government did nothing. They did not improve the infrastructure. I discussed the matter with the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) yesterday. He said that they had been waiting for a bypass in Dalton since 1936.

The problem with attracting industry to Barrow and Furness is that communications are difficult. We must improve the infrastructure. The work force in Barrow are second to none—they have built some fine submarines. However, there has been no commitment to spend public money, because the Government do not believe in spending public money. Believe me, the private sector will not build a decent road into Barrow and Furness.

We in Cumbria also have problems with Sellafield. Construction of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is near completion. Thousands of people in the construction industry will become unemployed because construction of that plant is nearing completion. Becoming unemployed in the middle of the worst recession that the Tories have created will be a major problem for those people. We need public investment and public commitment. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) will not solve their problems.

What did the Budget do for people in Barrow and for those on THORP who are to be made redundant? They did nothing at all; in fact, they made matters worse. Unless there is a Labour Government, and I am convinced that there will be a Labour Government——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: One of the key issues that have been raised by our constituents is interest rates. In my office, we have been doing some interesting research on these matters, which shows that, if general elections are called when interest rates are high, as happened in 1974 and 1979, the Government lose. The Conservative Government lost in 1974, when interest rates were nearly 13 per cent. The Labour Government lost in 1979, when interest rates were nearly 13 per cent. However, when they fall, as they fell in 1983 and 1987 and were in a trough, the Government of the day won. It is significant that, immediately after those general elections, interest rates soared. Many lessons are to be drawn from that, and one of them may be a sign of when the next general election might be called.

Mr. Martlew: I accept that. Obviously, my hon. Friend has done much deep thinking. It is a pity that Ministers are not capable of such deep thought. *[Interruption.]* I take a more political view than my hon. Friend. I have looked at the opinion polls, and I have noticed that the June election date has disappeared. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Workington will have an opportunity to speak later.

I am convinced that we shall have a June election, but it will be in 1992 and the Conservatives will lose. I was convinced that the Government would lose the election when I heard a senior Conservative Member tell a Lobby correspondent that the Government will fight the next general election on their record. If they do, the Labour party will win by 300 seats.

8.6 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his bold and ingenious Budget and, in particular, on the dramatic reduction in the community charge that he has been able to achieve. I have never had any difficulty defending the principle of the community charge—*[Interruption.]* I said the principle of the community charge, which is that most adults, as opposed to the minority of ratepayers, are asked to make a contribution to the cost of local council services. Very few people oppose that principle. There are certainly no grounds for apologising for seeking to introduce the principle into local government finance. As my right hon. Friend acknowledged in his Budget statement, the main problem was that the community charge was far too high and far higher than we were led to believe during the general election campaign in 1987.

I was one of the 100-odd Conservative Members who advocated the removal of the cost of education to halve the community charge. In so doing, we accepted that it was bound to mean a delay in implementing our long-standing commitment to reduce income tax still further to 20p in the pound. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has paid for the reduction of the community charge out of VAT, implementation of that commitment can now take place sooner rather than later, and I congratulate him on that.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend also on the fact that inflation is also to fall faster as a result of shifting the main burden of the community charge on to VAT. However, I

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appreciate, as several Opposition Members have said, that the underlying rate of inflation will fall more slowly. Hence I welcome recent press reports that the retail prices index is to be reviewed and perhaps reformed. I look forward to receiving confirmation of that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor replies to the debate. I hope that that will result in an index calculated in line with those in the rest of the European Community. It is clearly unfair for any party in government in this country to be criticised for inflation rates that appear higher than the inflation rates of our European competitors simply because our inflation rates include factors which theirs ignore.

Because VAT has been increased in the Budget, most businesses must decide whether to pass on the rise in the form of higher prices or to absorb the rise in order to encourage the good will of their customers. For tourism in particular, on which so many jobs, livelihoods and businesses depend in my constituency, it is not quite as easy as that. For example, tour and holiday operators will have to reissue invoices and confirmations to their clients who have already booked holidays. That will undoubtedly be a costly exercise for an industry that is already facing a difficult time. In addition, I have been told that the industry's code of conduct recommended by the Association of British Travel Agents discourages those businesses from passing on such an increase on holidays here in the United Kingdom—in anticipation, I understand, of the single European market in 1992.

Similar circumstances apply to hotels and guest houses which have quoted tariffs for this year, and perhaps even next year, upon which advance bookings have been made. Few of them will want to break their contracts on the prices that they have already quoted. They will have no choice but to absorb the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT unless, of course, the Treasury accepts the price originally agreed including VAT at 15 per cent. in the quarterly VAT returns of those companies. No doubt my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues will be receiving representations from the industry on that point.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman said that, if people had already bought their tickets, the tour operator would have to reinvoice them.

Mr. Atkinson: I did not say that. I referred to people who had already booked holidays and paid a deposit. I was referring to the cost of catering and accommodation.

One announcement in my right hon. Friend's Budget which has been warmly welcomed by small businesses in my constituency, particularly in tourism, in the hard-hit building industry and elsewhere, was of the increase in the VAT threshold to £35,000. That will relieve a great many of those businesses from VAT and the burden of its administration.

I have consistently stressed the futility of imposing that burden on smaller businesses, particularly when the cost of collection is more than the amount which is collected from those businesses. That cannot be right. I appreciate that that burden is imposed on us by the Community through the sixth directive on VAT. I have always understood that successive Treasury Ministers have tried to negotiate what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has now achieved, but they failed while he succeeded. I was delighted at my right hon. Friend's announcement in that regard.

I wish to press for further progress and urge my right hon. Friend to consider a much higher threshold of £100,000 turnover. If he can achieve that, he will be the toast of millions of small businesses throughout the Community, because he will relieve them of the burden of VAT.

I appreciate that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was under considerable restraint this year with little to give away. He was seeking a broadly neutral Budget. However, I was particularly disappointed that he responded only very marginally to representations made to him for VAT relief on charitable activities supported by voluntary fund raising.

I have a particular case in mind concerning a hospital project in the Wessex region. Thanks to her own initiative and enterprise, a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), Mrs. Mahrou Brown, who tragically lost her son through cancer, has, with her colleagues, raised £865,000 for her Pian Brown child cancer fund for a new children's cancer ward and child benefit unit at Southampton general hospital. However, because from last April health authorities ceased to be eligible for refunds on VAT paid on contractors' contracts, an additional £100,000 must now be raised to pay for that VAT. That cannot be right.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I assure my hon. Friend that the pain of that problem is not confined to Bournemouth. The Convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor in my constituency cares for a large number of elderly people on a residential basis. The nuns work selflessly without pay to look after those people. After an enormous amount of effort, they recently raised funds for necessary alterations, but they have told me that they must now find another £50,000. That is a disaster for them. Will my hon. Friend press his point to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his colleagues?

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend the Minister has heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) said. No doubt he will pass on her comments to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so that he can take account of our representations when he replies. I hope that next year my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be able to respond more positively to the representations made to him this year by the charities' tax relief group even to the extent of negotiating with the European Commission if that were appropriate for VAT relief on charities.

When I and some of my local colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), met the Dorset chamber of trade and industry recently to discuss the effects of the recession, we were told that interest rates, inflation and commercial debts represented the principal problems facing its members, together with the uniform business rate and the community charge for those who live over shops.

In his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor responded positively to each of those problems and I am grateful to him for his courage and imagination. The effect, I believe, will be to bring forward that so-called golden scenario of a 5 per cent. or lower inflation rate and a 10 per cent. or lower interest rate which, it is frequently

suggested, is essential for a Conservative election victory and which the previous Labour Government did not achieve.

8.18 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I shall not have to obey the 10-minute rule to respect injuctions to be brief. I intend to make only three points: the first about the poll tax battle, the second about the general shape of the Budget and the third on a specific point about privatisation proceeds.

With regard to the £140 "giveaway" planned this week, I do not mind if there is chaos surrounding the Tories' retreat from the poll tax. I would much rather have chaos surrounding a retreat from the poll tax than have the chaos that would inevitably result from its continuation. Nor do I mind the fact that the Tory party is indulging in a quick fix over the poll tax. The Conservatives have certainly chosen the wrong quick fix. It would be infinitely preferable to shift the short-term burden on to income tax, which would have been much fairer and progressive, than to have it shifted on to VAT. Nevertheless, although regressive, VAT is fairer than the poll tax.

I urge the Government even at this late stage to consider a suitable amendment to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill and to make the £140 rebate the minimum discount on the poll tax for each person this year. To do that, rather than deduct the sum from the total poll tax bill and then divide it by whatever rebate percentage to which the individual is entitled, would remove at a stroke the iniquitous 20 per cent. rule which hounds the poor, the unemployed, the disabled and students, all of whom have no capacity to earn, in an attempt to make them pay the iniquitous poll tax. Even at this late stage, with the Government performing not so much a U-turn as a zig-zag that varies from spokesperson to spokesperson and from Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Secretary of State for the Environment, I urge members of the Treasury Bench at least to consider an amendment which would at last introduce some sense of parity and justice for the poor who have suffered most from the poll tax.

I say to the few Labour Members present that there is no doubt in my mind, and I think that there is no serious doubt among the Scottish people, that, if the tax had been meekly accepted, particularly in Scotland which was used as the guinea pig and testing ground for it, we would not be witnessing the complete humiliation of the Conservative party which will extend in the next few weeks and months.

I tend to agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), who said:

"Now that the poll tax law has been seen to be an ass, can the Secretary of State find it within himself to congratulate the people of Scotland, who showed more wisdom than the politicians? Some of them argued that the only way to get rid of the poll tax was to have a general election, and that nothing could be done until there was a general election. Those Scots who marched, petitioned and protested, and some of whom withheld their tax in an act of civil disobedience, are the people who have destroyed the poll tax mark 1, as has been announced this evening."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 474.]

The Labour party would do well to heed those words with considerable care. In the light of the events of the past two years the explanation offered by the hon. Member for Hillhead and myself has undoubtedly proved to be better than the advice given by the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). They argued that people should stump up and pay up. We said, "Stand up and fight." It is that persistence which has destroyed the iniquitous poll tax.

Much of the controversy which has surrounded the long retreat from the poll tax has tended to overshadow the fact that this is a deflationary Budget. The Conservative party, having effectively surrendered monetary policy to the Bundesbank, is pursuing a passive approach to fiscal policy. That passive approach is probably preferable to the action of the Chancellor's predecessor but two who, in 1981, committed the ultimate mistake of deflating in the teeth of a severe recession. It is better to have no approach than to pursue the exactly opposite remedy. It would be much better and, certainly, would pull us out of the recession more quickly if, instead of relying on the automatic stabilisers on taxation and fiscal policy, the Government tried to lift the economy out of the recession which they themselves have engendered.

It is bad enough for those who live, often not through choice, in the formerly overheated economy of the south-east of England—the area at which the current economic policy has been solely directed—to take the consequences of the Government's mistakes in 1987 and 1988 in the form of the penal interest rate policies of the past two years. It adds substantial insult to considerable injury for the people of Scotland to have to suffer the medicine of high interest rates without ever having had the economic disease in the first place.

I have found it extraordinary over the past year to be told by successive Secretaries of State for Scotland that we should somehow be glad that the high interest rate policy is not biting on the Scottish economy as severely as it is hurting the people of the south-east of England—as though we should have some perverse satisfaction that suffering is being applied elsewhere. The main point is that the economic policy being pursued has never been appropriate for the Scottish economy.

Moreover, to judge from the figures, rather than the Government's fantasy, the Scottish economy is not weathering the recession. During the past five years, the Scottish figures for industrial production to the latest quarter are up 10·7 per cent. compared with 11·2 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole. Even more significantly, when one deducts the substantial surge in activity in North sea oil and gas, the increase in Scotland is a full eight points less than the overall United Kingdom average. For an economy which was never overheated in the first place, it has been intolerable to have to suffer the monetary squeeze of the past two years and now to endure a merely passive fiscal policy which has no relevance whatever to economic conditions in Scotland.

When we consider the severe localised economic problems in Scotland, such as the future of Rosyth naval base and the substantial problems of the steel and fishing industries caused by the Government's policy or lack of policy towards them, which immediately affect 60,000 jobs, we have no reason whatever to be satisfied even with the Government's modest forecast of economic recovery which they hope might come at some stage over the next year. If the forecasts of economic recovery are as accurate as those of the recession, which was not predicted in the first place, it would not be entirely surprising if the economic recovery failed to materialise.

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

It used to be said of the imbalance in economic policy between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom that compensation for this inappropriate macro-economic policy was made through regional policy. For the past 12 years, the Government have destroyed regional policy, and not just in the United Kingdom. They have done their level best to destroy or impede any development in regional policy throughout the European Community. Now we have a regional policy in reverse, as was shown comprehensively by the Scottish Television programme, "Scotching the Myth", broadcast suitable enough on St. Andrew's night in Scotland. It detailed point by point the enormous subsidies that pour into the south-east corner of the United Kingdom—the billions that pour into docklands, the hundreds of millions on civil service weightings and the enormous transport subsidies.

In his four months as Secretary of State for Transport, the present incumbent has spent 10 times what he managed to spend in four years as Secretary of State for Scotland —to mention nothing of the more than £1,000 million of additional relief in house mortgage subsidy which, once again, flows into the south-east corner. The additional relief on house mortgage subsidy to the south-east of England is greater than the regional policy budget for the whole of the rest of the United Kingdom put together. Such is the imbalance when the Tory party looks after its voters in the south of the United Kingdom.

Finally, I turn to yet another scandal which is about to be unleashed upon the Scottish people. Tomorrow, amid considerable fanfare, the Government intend to introduce the flotation of the Scottish electricity companies. That involves a substantial sum—no less than £1·5 billion of the £5·5 billion of privatisation proceeds estimated in the Budget.

I have information that the Scottish Office and the two financial advisers overseeing the flotation, the merchant banks Barclays de Zoete Wedd and British Linen, have agreed, as an official estimate, that the maximum take-up of shares for individual Scottish investors will be 25 per cent. That means that, at the very time of flotation, what has been heralded as an attempt to revive the Scottish private sector will result immediately in two of the largest companies in Scotland falling into the hands of those furth of Scotland. The privatised Scottish electricity companies will be in external ownership from the very point of flotation.

We have had some rare battles in Scotland during the past 10 years, on, for example, the Royal Bank of Scotland, when we were successful, and on other issues such as the Guinness-Distillers affair, when, unfortunately, the campaign to prevent a takeover was not successful; but this must be the first time that we shall have had a takeover by external interests on the very day of the privatisation.

I do not know whether the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is an expert on such matters or whether he has any familiarity with them or with the future of the hydro-electric company and Scottish Power, but perhaps either he or the Chancellor will confirm or deny the official estimates of the Scottish Office and the two merchant banks that are advising on the privatisation and say whether it is true that no more than 25 per cent. of the shares are meant to fall into the hands of individual Scottish investors. No doubt the institutional holdings will quickly reduce that percentage even further.

I understand from *The Daily Telegraph*, which must be an impeccable source on these matters——

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I can tell the hon. Gentleman straight that we should be delighted if a very much larger percentage of the equity of those companies went into the hands of Scottish individuals, and I am confident that it will.

Mr. Salmond: I am glad to hear it, but the Minister carefully avoided answering my question—whether from lack of knowledge or out of habit, I do not know. My question was, is it or is it not the official estimate—the working estimate—of the Scottish Office that no more than 25 per cent. of the shares will remain in Scottish hands? It is a simple question, and I hope that it will be answered this evening.

Incidentally, perhaps the Minister could explain why so much of the advertising of that privatisation has been on TVS and London Weekend television. Are the Government looking to sell as many shares as possible in the south of England?

I was going to say that *The Daily Telegraph*, that impeccable source, has suggested that there will be a substantial "spin-off" from the privatisation for the Conservatives' fortunes in Scotland. I must advise those Conservative Members who are present that, once the people of Scotland understand that the control and ownership of those companies will be removed from the Scottish people and taken furth of Scotland, there will not be a spin-off from the privatisations; there will be a substantial fallout for the already much diminished fortunes of the Scottish Conservative party.

Perhaps the only excuse for the Budget is that the Chancellor was so preoccupied with trying to fix the poll tax that he forgot entirely about the substantive economic problems facing the country. This is a standstill Budget, which is bad enough for an economy that is deep into recession, as is happening in the United Kingdom as a whole, but it is totally irrelevant for the Scottish economy which needs a substantial economic injection to pull it out of a recession engendered by economic policies designed to counter an inflationary disease in the south-east of England, which Scotland did not even experience in the first place.

8.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his excellent neutral Budget which is ideal for the times in which we live. I believe that he got the Budget judgment just about right. I particularly support his cautious but none the less relentless downward pressure on interest rates, giving due deference to the foreign exchange markets and to the way in which that will be interpreted there. At the same time, he has given confidence to business and to those markets themselves. The proof of the pudding with regard to this policy is that on each of the past two or three occasions when he has taken a 0·5 per cent. move downwards, the pound has strengthened against the deutschmark. That proves that his policy is giving confidence to the markets. Having spoken recently to some midlands industrialists, I know

that he is giving them confidence too. His policy shows that the Government mean business. The policy is working, and I urge him to continue in that line.

I shall be brief, because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) hopes to catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker, and as he and I share one particular concern, I shall pass over it briefly because my hon. Friend wishes to say more about it. I refer to the fact that, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), I am a little concerned about the Budget's effect on the motor industry, which is of critical importance to the west midlands. The industry is suffering at present, not merely from the effects of the recession, but also from the way in which we have chosen to raise taxation. I hope that something will be said about the motor industry in the reply to this debate for the benefit of those hon. Members who have raised that subject, but I shall say no more about that because my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield will develop that point further.

I very much welcome the help for small businesses that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, which shows a genuine sensitivity to their needs. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who is no longer in his place, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury to continue their efforts to press our European partners for a meaningful threshold for VAT for small businesses. I totally concur that the figure should now be about £100,000.

The present level is ridiculous. It places a huge burden of responsibility on small businesses and, in most cases, is not worth collecting. It also places undue pressure on small businesses, especially in the difficult times that they are experiencing at present. Raising the VAT threshold would make a major difference to such companies and to our ability to develop and sustain our small businesses so that they become bigger and more profitable businesses for our enterprise economy of the future.

I come now to savings. The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and most of the Labour Front Bench have dwelt on the question of training. The hon. Gentleman said that the key to the success of the German and Japanese economies was their training. The Germans may well have an excellent training system—mostly financed from private industry rather than from direct Government sources or taxation—but having worked intimately with a well-known Japanese firm for three years, I can advise the hon. Gentleman that the principal success of the Japanese, German and Swiss economies lies in the fact that they are savings-based economies and not spending economies. In trying to grasp that fundamental point, it is a pity that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor did not have room for manoeuvre to continue the work begun by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor in developing tax incentives and fiscal advantages to switch to a savings economy.

I am also concerned about the fiscal stance. Mention has been made of the need to spend a little more during a recession. The merit of the Government's policy over the past five or six years has been sound money, and I congratulate them on that. To have produced a balanced Budget and a Budget surplus from which debt repayment can be made was a masterly achievement, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) deserves considerable accolades for having achieved that.

Like others of my hon. Friends, however, I am concerned that we now seem to be moving into a Budget deficit. I would not normally be over-concerned about the size of a trade deficit while there was a balancing or countervailing Budget surplus, but I am concerned that we may be moving towards an envisaged public sector borrowing requirement and a Budget deficit at a time when the trade balance is still heftily in the red. We have seen a little improvement this month, but nevertheless it will remain heftily in the red. A trade deficit can be balanced by a Budget surplus, but to have both a trade deficit and a Budget deficit worries me a little. I say no more than that.

I wish to say a few words about increasing VAT. I heartily congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his move to raise VAT by 2·5 per cent., thereby reducing the burden of local taxes. I entirely support the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), when they suggested that after the continuous review or consultation period, as we are now calling it, we should extend the movement to central taxation and raise a significant portion, if not all of the money for local government services through VAT collected by central Government.

Where I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, for example, is on the margin. I do not believe that it would be a good idea to change the margin from zero to, say, 5 per cent. It would make much more sense to raise the overall level to a level similar to that levied in some of our principal competitor countries in the European Community, perhaps to an overall rate of 20 per cent. or thereabouts.

A move to increase VAT is extremely sensible, in that it taxes spending rather than earning. If we once again adopt the idea that we tax spending and reduce taxation on saving, we shall make the balance more akin to the successful economies of the world, especially Japan and Germany. Furthermore, I disagree with those who say that VAT is regressive. Zero rating benefits those on the bottom rung of the ladder and those who buy fancy toys, cars, televisions and expensive items pay far more. VAT is a fair way to raise money for local government. I wish that the Government would complete the move and raise all local government finance by that method.

My right hon. Friend's Budget is an excellent Budget for the times. I hope that he will consider ways of extending certain moves that I have already mentioned. I recommend the Budget to the House.

8.42 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): What a destructive and wasteful Government we have serving this nation. Some of the things that have been poured out from the Government are absolutely disgusting. All they are trying to do is to save their skins. That is what it is all about. If they think that the people out there, the electorate, do not know what is going on, they have another think coming. People know what is going on, and they know that the Budget is a con trick.

I remember when we had the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at the Dispatch Box for the first time to answer questions. I happened to have question 9 on that day. I suggested to the right hon. Gentleman that he had had an easy time in the Treasury. When he came along as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry I told him that

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

he had some work to do. He had to get industry out of the rut and the mess that it was in, which had been created by his own Government. He had to sort out the balance of payments problem. The Government are not going to do that. The balance of payments problem will get worse.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): We shall miss you, Frank.

Mr. Haynes: I shall miss the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), too. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) will also be on his way after the next election—there is no need to worry about that lad.

I told the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that if he did not sort out the problems he would have to buy a concrete suit and jump in the river just outside here. The Secretary of State has definitely failed the nation. I do not think that he knows what the job is about. He is wasting time in Parliament.

The hon. Member for Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) said that the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) should be given an accolade. I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I remember when he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He took us into the mess that we are in now. But when it got so bad, he ducked out of the job. He did not want it any longer. He blamed the problems on a little blip. Some blip that was! And what a mess we are in now.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer can sit there—I have one or two things to say about him too. *[Interruption.]* It is no good him ducking out of the Chamber behind the Speaker's Chair. He has ducked out of his responsibilities by nipping out of the Chamber.

In the Budget and at the Dispatch Box, we have heard it all before. Time has gone on and the Government have failed the nation time and again. I get the message loud and clear in my constituency about what people feel about what is in the Budget and how the ordinary working folk will be treated. I get around my constituency and talk to people in the pubs, clubs and elderly peoples' groups—*[Interruption.]* The Minister may laugh, but the smile will be taken off his face at the next election. The people out there have had enough. They tell me clearly in my constituency what they think about the Budget.

It is shameful that, since 1979, the Government have put more taxes on people than any other Government. It is shameful, shocking and wicked. The Government could not care less about the people at the lower end. They are looking after their own kind, as they do year after year whenever they get into office. The electorate are waking up because of what has happened in the Budget and on the poll tax. It is a real fiddle to knock off £140. Back home, people will still have the poll tax. The Government have not got rid of the poll tax yet, although they say they will.

God forbid that the Conservatives should win the election—I do not believe that they will. We shall win the next election and get rid of the poll tax, because we have said we will. We shall put something fairer in its place. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Hon. Members can bawl and shout from their seats as much as they like, but they are going to sit there and listen. They will listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) when she replies to the debate. They will be told a thing or two, as they were told when my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) opened the debate. They were given a lesson on how a Government should help industry with a view to investment so that industry can make the profits necessary in the interests of the workers, instead of laying them off, as this lot do. The Conservatives do it all the time. They did it back in the 1930s. I am old enough to remember. I was 65 three weeks ago. I am old enough to know what happened previously and before the war. I know, and the people in my age group know, how the Conservative party treats people when it gets into office.

At long last the people are waking up to what is going on. The hon. Member for Northfield can take the grin off his face because he will be looking for a job elsewhere after the next election and he knows it. I have listened to some of the things that he has said since he has been in the House. There is no doubt that the does not know how ordinary folk go on. He has his head in the clouds like many more in the Conservative party.

We have had it all before and, while the Conservatives are in office, we shall get it again. They talk about a 4 per cent. inflation rate. They have promised it all before, but they have never achieved it. Up it went, and the workers paid out of their pockets to dig the Tories out of a hole, but people are now seeing through that con trick.

I remember the Secretary of State for the Environment when he sat on this side of the House—pre-1979—just before he waved that Mace around the Chamber. He said that under a Labour Administration, there was far too much central control. So what is happening now? The Government are introducing more and more central control which is hitting local authorities and the way they implement their policies. Ordinary folk are getting a real bashing because of the 2·5 per cent. on value added tax to pay for the £140 poll tax reduction. Many people in my constituency get relief on the poll tax, but no one will get relief on the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT. Everyone has to pay that, so the increase hits people on lower incomes. The hon. Member for Canterbury may well yawn—he will have plenty of time for yawning after the next election. I want to see a Labour Member for Canterbury. We shall be in Government so there will be some fair rations then.

The Government talk about what they have done for the people. They have certainly done something for some people. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) should shut up while I am on my feet. I am surprised that you have not stopped him yacking, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I always listen to other hon. Members, so the hon. Gentleman should listen to me. I was rather surprised that, when Brigg town came to play Sutton town in my constituency last Saturday, the hon. Gentleman did not turn up to support his own club. I mentioned it to all the management, so he has lost their votes.

Where has all the money gone? The Government have sold off nearly all public industry. With the proceeds, they could have helped people who are really in need, but they have had to put 2·5 per cent. on VAT to pay for the £140 poll tax reduction. That is a shocking state of affairs but, slowly and surely, the electorate are learning.

The Government have failed miserably with their training programme. When Labour is in office, there will be a proper training programme so that we have skilled workers with jobs at the end of their course. At the moment, people go on some training scheme for a couple

of years because the Government assure them that there will be a job at the end of it, but there are already 2 million unemployed and there will soon be 3 million.

On Saturday night, I spoke to some people from the Confederation of British Industry at a reception during a concert. There was a break of about 20 minutes for a drink. I drank orange juice because I had my car. The people from the CBI said that the Government had failed industry, and indeed they have. They are trying to duck their responsibility by using a con trick on the nation.

David Puttnam and Richard Attenborough went to see the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) to try to get help for the film industry. She guaranteed them £5 million over about three years. The Conservative party sacked its leader and also the £5 million—the film industry has not seen a penny of it, although the industry is an important exporter. We train the finest actors in the world—there is no doubt about that. They used to make films in this country before the Conservatives came to power in 1979. Since then, the industry has gone down.

The right hon. Member for Finchley recognised that we should pick it up, and she guaranteed the industry £5 million. She set up a committee with a view to putting the matter right, but under their new leader and with new Secretaries of State the Government have failed the industry. I am interested in that industry and always have been, like many other hon. Members. We want it to be successful. The Minister is not listening—he is yacking to the Chief Whip—but I want him to listen because I want the Government to do something about that industry, as the right hon. Member for Finchley promised before she was sacked. I want the Minister to tell the Chancellor, who has nipped out of the Chamber, that an appeal has been made on behalf of the film industry.

The Government have been a complete failure for the nation. I am pleased that the Chancellor has now come back. He knows that what I have said is true. The sooner we get rid of this Government, the better.

8.56 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): It is always a privilege to hear a speech by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). I observed that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made good his escape at the start of the hon. Gentleman's peroration. I have to say that he did not miss very much. I enjoy the hon. Gentleman's neanderthal approach to socialism—he will be sadly missed when he leaves the House at the next election. Those of us who will be back will have to look on the Opposition's serried ranks of grey socialism which, so far during this debate, have failed to come up with any policies to help our economy develop.

I consider the Budget to be rather like a wine that has matured over the weekend as the salient points have been digested. They seem all the better for examination.

We are moving through difficult economic times, for a catalogue of reasons which go back many years before the Conservative Goverment came to power in 1979. Business people in the west midlands in particular want economic stability. They are fed up with brief periods of raging economic growth being followed by periods of recession. If they are to be sure of sustained, programmed growth, businesses—certainly those in the west midlands, and, I believe, those in the rest of the country—need a period of controlled interest rate reduction, fair exchange rates and general financial stability.

I was particularly struck by certain items in the Budget. One was the important but largely unsung incentive provided by profit-related pay, which I hope will be welcomed throughout the country. When the economy picks up, we do not want roaring demand for wages which will not be paid for either by productivity agreements or by the profitability of the business or service concerned. The scheme should be popular not only with businesses but with trade unions, whose objective is to further their members' interests.

The sale of stocks and shares in high street shops is, I think, an excellent way of carrying the torch of capitalism even further than has been managed by our privatisation programme. Lingerie was once sold behind screens in department stores, away from the public gaze—certainly out of the sight of men. Over the past few years, however, there has been a transformation of retailing practice. It is now possible to purchase lingerie from Knickerbox on the concourse at Epsom station. I look forward to the time when there is a Stockbox alongside Knickerbox. The more shares are brought into the public marketplace—the high streets, for instance—the more people will embrace the aims of capitalism, and appreciate the importance of taking a fair share in the value of British industry.

I am sorry that I was not here for the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), because I believe that he mentioned the car industry—as did the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). That industry is especially important to the west midlands, and I hope to say something about it myself.

We have heard a good deal today about the problems of local government finance, about the obvious move towards more central funding, and about a local levy to replace the poll tax. Some hon. Members have spoken of the desirability of transferring all local funding to central Government. There is, of course, some merit in such a system—the money would be raised through income tax, VAT or both—but the cost to the taxpayer would preclude any reduction in income tax in the foreseeable future.

Attractive though that panacea may be, I fear that it would lead us into the quagmire of central funding for all local authority services. I am reminded of the problems that we encounter in seeking a fair and equitable system of funding for the National Health Service. Whenever operations are cancelled or wards are closed, for whatever reason—irrespective of the way in which the local administration conducts its affairs—the finger is always pointed at the Government. They are invariably accused of having underfunded the service, although they can prove that they have financed it more than adequately. When money is short, the Government get the brickbats.

Representing as I do such a great city as Birmingham, I would not like to be faced with a constant procession of people telling me that education, housing and social services are inadequately funded because central Government have not got the formula right. Unless we can devise a block grant formula that is wholly fair—a task that has defied Governments for generations—central funding will not be an acceptable alternative. We need a mixture of the two types of funding.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has increased the levy on personal use of company cars. I remind my right hon. Friend that the company car forms the basis of the

[Mr. Roger King]

British motor industry's production requirement: the bedrock of the annual sale of 600,000 has attracted such overseas manufacturers as Toyota, Nissan and Honda to this country, and provided a springboard for entry into the world market. The motor industry is on course to export half a million cars this year; that is an outstanding achievement, on which a substantial home market has been built. If we jeopardise that home market by persuading the company car fleet owner to ask his employees to buy their own cars, there is a danger that they will buy foreign cars. I think that my right hon. Friend may have gone a bit too far.

Having expressed that reservation, however, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on an excellent Budget.

9.3 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) summed up the Budget last week when she said that it would be remembered as the "poll tax Budget".

Midland Montagu, in its analysis of the Budget, said:

"The budget has been dictated by the over-riding need to cut poll tax bills for the coming year".

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) that the Chancellor's speech was almost as striking for what he did not say as for what he did. With forecasts that show the economy to be in an appalling state, but with little indication of how the Government plan to deal with that, I was surprised to see the Chancellor's speech referred to as "bold" and "courageous". He was not courageous enough to mention the two worst indicators found in the Red Book—the fall of 5 per cent. in output and the fall of 10 per cent. in fixed investment. The latter figure is particularly striking when we recall that the fall in economywide fixed investment is the biggest year-on-year fall in such investment since the great depression of 1931 to 1932.

It is no wonder that S. G. Warburg says in its response to the Budget:

"Not only does the gloomy period come first, but the longer term optimism is rather suspect"

The Chancellor, however, had the courage to mention rising unemployment. Unfortunately, that was all he did—mention it. He spoke sternly about inflation, although whether it was courage or foolhardiness that he showed by gambling with inflation is another matter. The Chancellor, through the increase in VAT and the increase in prescription charges announced a few days before the Budget, has inflicted yet another inflation own goal. That is just what the Government did all last year, and it has brought us to our present pass.

I know that the increase in VAT will not show in the same way in the headline figures or the retail prices index, but it will show up in prices. That gamble on VAT is a poll tax surcharge, imposed in an attempt to save the Government's neck. The *Financial Times* called it

"a tax to save the Conservatives from the just consequences of their own folly."

I notice that it was *The Times* which said that this was the nearest any British Government had come to handing out fivers on the street corner. On the basis of the cut in the poll tax figures, the *Financial Times* predicted that next year we shall see luncheon vouchers handed out in return for voting Conservative at the next election—*[Interruption.]* That is not my joke, but that of the *Financial Times*.

Better forecasts for inflation were made in the Red Book and in the Chancellor's speech, although the gross domestic product deflator, in common with the most recent inflation figures, suggest that there are still problems. We have been given better forecasts for the balance of payments, but we believe that that is the least that we should expect from a flattened economy. Kleinwort Benson has said in its commentary:

"The Treasury's forecast that inflation falls further" in the subsequent year "to 3·75 per cent. is too optimistic . . . there are too many special items . . . that worked to reduce the rate of the UK RPI in 1991, and are unlikely to be repeated in 1992"

We have all along predicted that there will be improvements in inflation and other indicators because of the way in which the economy has been flattened, but what about the longer-term perspective? Once again, the Budget shows that there is none. The Government seem to be looking not one day further than the day of the next general election.

The predictions of falling interest rates, inflation and balance of payments—at least for a period—is what we used to call the window of opportunity in which the Government were hoping to hold the election. We should now re-identify that anticipated period as the eye of the hurricane. It has long been predicted that there would be some deterioration in the economy when the squeeze was lifted. But what is now crystal clear, just as we feared, is that the Government plan not to learn from the past mistakes but to repeat them—at least partly for electoral reasons.

The signal that the Government gave in 1988—I am pleased to see the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) in his place, because it was his signal—fostered the credit boom and added to the tax cuts all those words about the economic miracle and our problems being at an end. One mistake that the Government are now threatening to repeat is giving the same signal.

Mr. Lawson: Will the hon. Lady quote the statement to which she referred?

Mrs. Beckett: Does the former Chancellor disown the phrase "economic miracle"?

Mr. Lawson: Yes, I do. Will the hon. Lady quote the statement to which she referred?

Mrs. Beckett: I apologise if I have done the right hon. Gentleman an injustice. I recall the phrase being used. I recall it being used by the present Prime Minister. If the right hon. Gentleman is shifting the blame from himself on to the Prime Minister, that is fine by me.

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Lady will find that I quoted a number of other people who had referred to an "economic miracle".

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for putting the record straight with such commendable accurancy. I am afraid that I do not recall his strong denials, his dissociation from those words of his suggestion that there might be anything flawed in those remarks.

There is no doubt that the Government are giving a similar signal today. When we went into the exchange rate mechanism, the then Chancellor, now Prime Minister,

talked about the adjustment that we would have to make and the sacrifices that would be required. As we feared, the present Chancellor is trying to tell the electorate that those hard times and sacrifices are already behind them. The Government are saying that there is no alternative to their proposals, that no one could run the economy better than them—an example of hubris which no doubt will shortly be followed by nemesis.

Why are the Government facing these problems? The Chancellor said—this is probably just one explanation which he wants to give—that recession in a market economy was "inescapable". That is a new line in Tory propaganda. Will the right hon. Gentleman put that in the election manifesto? I do not remember it being in the 1987 manifesto. The other usual suspect is, to quote my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), that "little mistake" in 1987 to which the Government admit —interest rates cuts. I notice that increasingly, when the Government mention that "little mistake", it seems that even that was our fault, not theirs.

What other slings and arrows have beset the Government? Under what harsh strokes of fate have they reeled? What terrible ill luck has beset them?

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I should like to continue.

Apart from the Government's mistakes and misjudgments, I can see only one piece of ill luck. The tragedy for this country is that the Government have had £100 billion of income from the North sea, money that they used to keep the electorate sweet while they made the economy the test bed for theories which even they have now abandoned. The oil provided a cushion which allowed them to win three elections in a manner that convinced them that they were invincible. Because they were so sure that they could not lose, no matter what they did, they dared not only to run risks with the economy but to introduce the poll tax —an awful warning of the dangers of a fourth term.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I should like to get a little further on, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

The same arrogance as the Government displayed then leads them to become increasingly erratic in their own defence. All this week, they have triumphantly announced that they have shot people's foxes and stolen Labour's clothes—I think that they have a little machine in central office that turns out those lines.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who sadly is not with us this evening, got his lines correct, but evidently he came in on the wrong cue. He was reported this week as saying that inflation was falling "like a stone". If a 0·1 per cent. decrease in the headline rate of inflation is "falling like a stone", what is a 0·1 per cent. increase in the underlying rate of inflation? Is that rising, like the Government's blood pressure? We know what the right hon. Gentleman probably meant to say—under a Government who claim such sweeping success, it is investment, output and employment that are falling "like a stone".

We had the ill-timed recitation about the Government having stolen the Labour party's clothes. I detect some inconsistency. Until about two or three weeks ago the Government were complaining that the Labour party had no policies. As recently as the autumn statement debate, the Chancellor said of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith):

"The right hon. and learned Gentleman has no policy." —[*Official Report*, 13 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 866.]

That accusation having failed to serve, the Government decided to steal the policies which they had recently detected. Tragically for the country, they have not stolen our policies. There is nothing in the Budget to assist long-term investment in training, but it contains cuts in real terms of over £200 million.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) quoted the chairman of a group of TECs who gave evidence to his Select Committee on Employment. He said that the TECs had had an overall reduction in their funding and that it has resulted in a major problem. He referred to a draconian average 45 per cent. cut in real terms in their budgets and he called on the Chancellor to reinstate the training and enterprise budgets at last year's level—a call which has gone unheeded.

There was little in the Budget to promote investment in manufacturing, although what was there was welcome. If the CBI's prediction of a 16 per cent. fall in manufacturing investment proves correct, manufacturing fixed investment, including lease assets in the coming year, will be below the level that the Government inherited in 1979. Before the Budget, a House of Lords Select Committee said:

"The Government no longer has any view of the strategic importance to the nation of certain industries, or indeed of any industries at all. All the evidence shows that the present lack of Government commitment, support and assistance is deeply damaging to industry and to our national interest."

The Government's response was to cut the rate of corporation tax. On 7 March the *Financial Times* said that the cut in the corporation tax rate

"would merely deliver windfall gains to those companies that manage to survive the recession."

In its response to the Budget, the Engineering Employers Federation said that cutting interest rates would have done far more and that what the Chancellor did

"was not an adequate response to the problems of the UK industry and does not address the problems of UK industry and doesn't address the problems of companies not having enough cash to invest for the future."

In its commentary on the Budget, Phillips and Drew observed that the Chancellor's measures

"amount to no more than a teaspoon with which to hold back the recessionary tide."

Those are the measures so highly praised by Conservative Members.

The other measure to which the Government gave too little was child benefit. I draw a distinction between our proposals for the Budget and the general shape of our public expenditure proposals. We have clearly said that we have clear and specific commitments to pensions. We will increase the pension for a single person by £5 and for a married couple by £8. We have also said that we will restore child benefit to the level that it would be if it have been index-linked since 1987. We have said that we wish to make other proposals, but that they would be made as resources allowed, and that we would give priority to education and training and investment in manufacturing industry. As the election drew nearer and we had a better idea of what we were likely to inherit, we would be more specific about some of our proposals.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I want to put this on the record, but if I have time I shall give way later.

Mr. Walden: I should like to get on to the record.

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Science made clear earlier in the debate, we have committed ourselves to a steady increase in education spending as a proportion of our gross domestic product. That will be done as resources allow, but at present we are not in a position to put a timescale on it. That is more of a commitment than anything that we have heard from the Conservative party. All that we have heard is that education is dear to the Prime Minister's heart, and one cannot get much less specific than that.

The Chief Secretary and the Secretary of State for Social Security get very excited about this, so for their benefit I shall set the record straight. The main proposals made in what has been described as our shadow Budget were meant for the present Chancellor, for the latest Budget, in this year of expenditure. We made that plain from the beginning. I know that the right hon. Gentleman sent someone from Central Office to our press conference, so that person will be able to tell him precisely what was said there—at least someone from Central Office attended it. Who sent him is not my problem.

Those proposals included changes relating to training and revenue. Not hypothecated, of course—perish the thought. On revenue, we presented an illustrative package. I will be open with the House, and admit that it was designed for one purpose only, which it achieved. That package was designed to show clearly that the Chancellor had the capacity and room for manoeuvre to make programme changes of the kind, and on the scale, that we proposed without having to increase the basic rate of income tax.

In a rational world, it should not be necessary to bother making such distinctions, but in this irrational world, in the House, and confronted by an increasingly desperate Government, it is impossible to advance any proposal of any kind that the Government have not themselves advocated without some idiot saying that it will mean an increase in the basic rate of income tax of 10p or 20p—as the Financial Secretary claimed the other day. Our central contention has been proved beyond doubt because the Chancellor himself raised sums similar to those that we proposed, although mostly from a different range of sources.

I turn to the specific criticisms that have been made of the figures we gave. The Chief Secretary sought to imply —although, as always with the Government, it is necessary to read the small print—that our figures were in some way incorrect. To be blunt, that is untrue.

I refer to the figure for child benefit and to the Chief Secretary's speech at Southport last weekend. He said:

> "John Smith said that the increase could cost £775 million. And so it would if no changes were made to income support levels."

But we did not propose any changes to income support levels. That proposal related to the Government's Budget and concentrated on the minimum that we thought that they should provide. We were confident that the Government would not both reverse the cuts in the value of child benefit and increase the level of income support payments. We were right, because they were not prepared to do so—*[Interruption.]* The Government fed their increase through to income support—Conservative Members should listen before they try to nit-pick about accuracy. They acted in accordance with our predictions, so we called on them to make a commitment that we thought was important.

There was another reason why the Government did not feed through their increase to income support. The Government froze child benefit from 1987, when the Prime Minister said it would be paid "as now". They gave a £1 increase for the eldest child in April, but that was not added to income support. The Government intend to claw back maintenance payments from the fathers of single parent families, and they will not be fed through to income support. We were perfectly right to expect the Government to be consistent in that respect.

In Southport, the Chief Secretary said that the Government were proposing on this occasion to feed that increase through. Good. It is about time. It is practically the first time in living memory that they have done so. However, not all the money raised from freezing the married couple's allowance is being fed through to income support or child benefit. In the same way, in the past, the Government froze child benefit and claimed that they were giving money to low-income families—but they did not give it all to them.

There is another reason why we prefer the full increase in child benefit to the Government's proposals. Some 25 per cent. of those entitled to income support do not claim it. Half the families entitled to family credit do not claim it. The only way of ensuring that the increase in child benefit goes to the 98 per cent. of families who claim it is to implement the balance of the increase there.

The Chief Secretary spoke of our costing as "a piece of incompetence" when it is correct and mentioned an error of £300 million. It is not our error; it is the Chief Secretary's distortion—a distortion that comes precious near to deceit.

In the case of offshore trusts, until we see the Government's proposals in the Finance Bill we shall not know whether what the Chief Secretary said about that was more accurate than what he said about child benefit. I do not know how many hon. Members saw the story in *The Observer* yesterday written by a group of tax planners who say that the Chancellor

> "proposes to leave intact many of the tax advantages of trusts established offshore prior to . . . March 1991."

Of course that was not our proposal.

That brings me to the £619 million that the Chancellor could raise from personal pensions. One would never think from all the fuss that the Government are to stop paying for them in a year or two. That particular payment and that source are analagous to the money that the Chancellor will raise from 1992 from national insurance contributions on company cars. There is absolutely no doubt that the cessation of the 2 per cent. incentive, as the Government prefer to call it, will mean extra revenue for the next Government on the scale that we identified. There is no doubt either that the Chancellor could bring that payment forward. Just as they did over child benefit, the Government profess shock that we dare to suggest that they might engage in any element of retrospection, and

implied that there had been some breach of contract. In Southport, the Chief Secretary called it a disgraceful suggestion.

Why do we think that the Government would engage in retrospection? Let us look at the Government's record; let us look at the cost. The cost of the benefit was predicted at £60 million a year when it was first proposed, and it now costs more than £600 million. When single payments reached £400 million, the Secretary of State told the House that the expenditure was out of control and single payments were abolished. Incidentally, the biggest losers were the families on income support about whom we were seeing so many crocodile tears a few moments ago. It is not the case that those getting the 2 per cent. extra rebate are in some way paying more and therefore being deprived of something to which they are contributing. It is the rest of us, all the other national insurance contributors, who are paying for that rebate. The people who signed up initially were promised a rebate for five years, and the Government backdated it to 1987, so by next April those people will have had their full five years' worth of promised rebates.

That brings me to my third point. The Secretary of State, in cahoots with the Prime Minister, has a long track record of removing benefits for which people have paid, despite the fact that their contributions have increased under this Government while the benefits have been removed. The current Secretary of State and the Prime Minister removed from the disabled the right to receive invalidity allowance, as well as earnings-related pensions for which they had paid. They stopped people with industrial injuries getting any benefit if they were assessed at less than 14 per cent. They brought in the changes to the reduced earnings allowances, depriving some people of £20 a week, and halved the help to mothers on income support through maternity grants. Their record is littered with examples of retrospective taxation.

Let me now turn to the breach of contract. The occupational pension scheme for the police and the fire service calls for those in the ranks to retire from those occupations at 55 in the public interest. When they do so, most of them take other jobs and have a duty to pay their national insurance contribution. That duty remains, but their right to draw unemployment benefit should the need arise was in effect extinguished by the Government in 1989. So they still have to pay contributions, but they do not get any benefit. What was that about breach of contract?

Let me return to the Government's charge and summarise. The figures that we gave were correct and it is indicative of the Government's desperation that they go to such lengths to seek to discredit us.

This week, there has been a lot of talk about shot foxes. All that I can say is, "Bang." Incidentally, the Government make a great deal of fuss about personal pensions—about the extent to which this 2 per cent. rebate is intended to encourage people; about how wrong it is not to offer choice; about how there should be extra encouragement —*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen carefully.

I understand from the Fees Office that the choice that Conservatives urge so earnestly on their constituents has been exercised by precisely one Member of this House. I wonder who it is who urges this choice on his constituents and is himself the only Member of the House who is foolish enough to take it out? Is it the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), the once begetter of this plan? Is it the Chancellor? Is it the Prime Minister? Is it the Secretary of State for Social Security? It appears that those people have more sense than to take out the benefits that they urge on their constituents. This gamble is for other people, but not for themselves.

Finally, I turn to the Government's fiscal rectitude and their policy stance. It is not our policies, but theirs, that have a gaping hole. We say that one cannot have income tax cuts and increased investment; the Government say that one can. We say that it is an uphill struggle to become competitive within the exchange rate mechanism; the Government say that the struggle is nearly over. We are willing to tell the British people the truth; the Government are not. The Red Book continues to promise income tax cuts; Ministers promise increased investment. Today's *Financial Times* says:

"Labour is frank about its intention to increase taxation, and the Liberal Democrats".

Of the Conservatives, the newspaper says:

"You cannot promise better services, raise value added tax to fund local spending, forecast a series of Budget deficits for three years ahead, maintain sterling within the exchange rate mechanism and, at the same time, swear that you will cut the standard rate of income tax to 20p. It does not add up, and the public will perceive that it does not."

As in the case of the poll tax, the Government are seeking to be all things to all people. They tell those who like the poll tax that they are keeping it; they tell those who do not like it that they are abolishing it. They tell those who want income tax cuts that they can have them; they tell those who want increased investment that they can have that instead. Confusion reigns. There is a phrase that many people use when they describe confusion. They say that someone does not know whether he is coming or going. The Government are going—and the sooner the better.

9.32 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): This Budget brought about the biggest switch in taxation for more than a decade. Not surprisingly, that has dominated a very large part of the debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) that the heart of the debate ought to be the economic prospects of the country for the next year. The economy has been in recession since about the middle of last year [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] The very moment I became Chancellor I admitted that businesses—particularly many small businesses—were having a difficult time. However, as I predicted at this time last year, the pain has brought gains. Inflation has been falling. It is now down by two percentage points from its peak last autumn, and is set to fall to about 4 per cent. by the end of this year.

Equally dramatic has been the very considerable improvement in the current account. It was noticeable that no Opposition Member chose to mention today's current account figures. Normally the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is on the box every hour, almost every minute, telling us about the trade figures.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I will give way in a moment.

On this occasion, the silence of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was very noticeable. Today's announcement of a £200 million deficit was obviously welcome. I have always said that the figures on the current account ought to be treated with some caution and

[Mr. Lamont]

scepticism. That is not the position that has been adopted by the Opposition; they attach importance to every month's figures.

Of course, the trend in the current account has been clear for some time. The deficit in the latest three months was less than one fifth of the deficit in the third quarter of 1989. Part of the improvement has come from so-called invisible trade—but there has also been a remarkable turn-round in manufacturing trade. Again, manufacturing trade usually concerns Labour Members, but we did not hear very much about it today. The deficit in manufactures has fallen to £1·2 billion in the latest three months. That is less than 1 per cent. of gross domestic product, and the lowest since 1985. Despite the slow growth in demand abroad—we are not the only country facing a slow-down in growth of demand—many industries have expanded their exports. There has been a dramatic rise in car exports in Britain. Indeed, exports have increased by about 45 per cent. in a year.

Mr. Morgan: If we have a trade deficit of about £2 billion a month during a period of boom, and during a period of recession we have a deficit of about £500 million, at what stage in the trade cycle shall we ever have a trade surplus under this Government? That is what puzzles Opposition Members.

Mr. Lamont: As I have said on many occasions, and as my predecessor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) said, the sort of deficit that we are running—about 1 per cent. of GDP—is one that is common to many countries. Only two or three countries have a surplus. There are many countries in deficit, and every surplus has an offsetting deficit. We can easily cope with a deficit of 1 per cent. of GDP.

It is clear that the inflationary pressures and excess demand that appeared in 1988 have been reversed. As they have disappeared and as inflation has come down, so we have been able to reduce interest rates. I know that many Opposition Members and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends want to see further reductions in interest rates, but I shall not take any lectures from Opposition Members about such reductions. We all know that their view is that, whatever the position of the economy, whatever the level of the interest rates and whatever the policy should be, they will be in favour of reducing interest rates from whatever level they may have reached. That is always their policy.

I make no apology for being cautious in policy. Inflation is coming down and the prospect is good. We cannot take risks, however, either with the exchange rate or with inflation at home. Too often in the past we have assumed that we have won the battle against inflation. The very moment that we have let up has been the moment that inflation has been rekindled. The way in which we can retain the confidence of the market is essential to any recovery, and that is why we have been able to reduce interest rates again by 0·5 per cent. in the past week.

I make no apology, either, for continuing the sound approach to Government finances, and especially that of my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend for saying that it was wholly right and proper that at this stage of the cycle the Government should run a deficit, and the fact that the Government were doing so was no departure from previous policy. He said that, provided the Government aimed, as we do, to balance the Budget over the cycle, that was entirely in keeping with his policies and those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir. G. Howe).

We shall see a return to deficit as a result of the recession. I know of no one who would seriously argue that we should try to hold the Budget to balance at this stage of the cycle. I repeat that we shall aim to balance it over the whole cycle. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby that it is vital that we continue to keep a tight control on public spending. That is at the heart of the Government's economic policy.

Opposition Members have had a lot of fun at the expense of the economic forecasts. I do not begrudge them that, although I believe that it is wrong to attribute to economic forecasts any spurious scientific accuracy. The forecast that I published last week is, in many respects, more cautious about growth than the consensus of outside forecasts. I am not in the business of publishing forecasts that are more optimistic than I think is the case, as that leads us nowhere. It is better to put the facts before Parliament and the country.

As a result of the fall in output that we have already had, output is below the average for 1990. Therefore, the fall of 2 per cent. that I forecast for 1991 does not mean that output will continue to fall for long. There is every reason to expect that growth will start again towards the middle of the year. I cannot be certain about that, but there are a number of persuasive and compelling reasons why it is likely to be so, and I put them to the pseudo-realists in the Opposition who argue that the outlook is more gloomy.

First, the start of the recession was followed quickly by the Gulf war, which had a tremendous dampening influence on confidence and on particular industries. That has ended and is beginning to affect the economy. Secondly, we have been through a period of exceptional weakness in the dollar, which has made life difficult for some export companies. That, too, has changed markedly in the recent past. Thirdly, nobody seriously disputes our forecast that the fall in inflation will continue and there is widespread agreement that RPI inflation will be down to about 4 per cent. by the end of the year. The other side of that fall in inflation will be a rise in real incomes.

Lastly, as usual in a recession, industry has cut back its stocks. We expect that to slow down and contribute to growth as more of the demand for goods is met directly out of production. That view is widely shared. Again, I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby for confirming that he felt that the recession would not be so bad as the one in 1980-81 and would be relatively shallow and short-lived.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer agree with the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) that a Government who cannot choose are no longer fit to rule?

Mr. Lamont: The Government have chosen. Of course I agree with my right hon. Friend, although it is rather sad that he did not put the remark in the original French in which it was made. The Government have made their position on the issue crystal clear.

It was against the prospect that I have outlined that I decided that the centrepiece of the Budget should be a package of measures to help businesses to weather the recession and encourage them to invest for the longer term. In total, the Budget will add some £0·75 billion to businesses' cash flow, and that benefit will continue in future years.

In designing that package, I listened carefully to hon. Members and my hon. Friends, and to the representations made by business men. Although the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that the package is no good for industry or commerce, they did not say what the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce or the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses said. All those organisation, without qualification or reservation, welcomed the Budget as a Budget for business.

The hon. Member for Derby, South quoted extensively from the *Financial Times* but not from the two editorials which said that it had been a first-class Budget. She simply quoted odd remarks from articles that she found on page 31 of the newspaper.

It is all too easy, when discussing a Budget for business, to concentrate on the multinational companies, the household names. That is something that the Labour party tends to do, but there are millions of small businesses employing perhaps only two or three people. Those are the businesses that I tried to help with my measures. One such measure, which has been welcomed in the debate by many hon. Members, was to reduce the waiting period for VAT relief on bad debts to one year and raising the VAT threshold by 40 per cent.—the largest increase ever in real terms, so that up to 150,000 more businesses could be taken out of the VAT net.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I shall not give way just now.

I also proposed measures which mean that the very smallest businesses have more time to pay their PAYE payments to the Inland Revenue, which will relieve about 700,000 employers of an administrative burden.

I did two things for the larger companies. First, for what we tend to call the small company but which is, in reality, medium sized, I upped the lower and upper profit limits for the second year running of the small companies' corporation tax, which will help many medium-sized businesses.

Lastly—this has been asked for by some of the business organisations—I not only cut by two percentage points the rate of corporation tax, giving us one of the lowest in the world, but reduced it retrospectively. That means it will help companies immediately in a year when their needs are greatest and they have the greatest difficulty with cash flow. I note that Opposition Members have said on previous occasions that they do not agree with cutting corporation tax and want investment allowances and capital allowances. The House will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby got rid of capital allowances, and since he did that, corporation tax has been reduced by 20 percentage points.

We can only bring back significant capital allowances if we raise the rate of corporation tax again. If Opposition Members want to bring back capital allowances, they should tell us, and those in industry who want to know, what rate of company taxation they have in mind. If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East wants to intervene now to tell the House and the country what the rate of corporation tax would be, I will gladly give way to him. He makes no reply. Perhaps the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) will give me the reply.

Mr. Battle: Will the Chancellor explain why the measures that he is proclaiming in the House are not getting through to industry on the ground? That is so much so that one of the medium-sized firms in Leeds today —GKN, a well-established company—is making 200 people redundant because it says that the recession is biting hard. How will the Chancellor's measures prevent that firm from laying off people, allow it to renew its investment and ensure that it gets orders?

Mr. Lamont: The measures will get through and help British business. That has been recognised by the Confederation of British Industry, chambers of commerce, the Institute of Directors and every business organisation in the country.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made a dour speech. It seems that he is more ready to publicise bad news than to celebrate good news. Normally, he digs out about five press releases a day for each month's trade figures, but this month, when we have good trade figures, incomprehensibly he did not get to the Dispatch Box to tell us about them. I cannot recall seeing a single press release from the hon. Gentleman welcoming some of the events that have happened in recent months. There has been no press release welcoming the fact that inflation has fallen by almost two percentage points since October or that the United Kingdom's inflation differential with the European Community has very much narrowed in recent months. We have had no press release from him celebrating and accepting the fact that our share of world trade in manufactures rose both in 1989 and 1990.

As usual, we had from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East a cornucopia of obscure statistics from around the world. If Nicaragua increases its exports, the hon. Gentleman is quick to note it. When he finds that there are hundreds of thousands of students in institutions of higher education in Korea, he tells us all about it. He does not tell us what loans or grants they have or what the pupil-teacher ratio is in Korea. He does not tell us about the good news and the good things that are happening in this country. That was epitomised at the point at which I challenged the hon. Gentleman this afternoon—the response of the shadow Chancellor to my Budget broadcast when the Labour party put on a broadcast purporting to make international comparisons in training between this country and other EEC countries.

The comparison and tables in that broadcast were based on a study from the EEC, but they had no common definition of training, no common definition of skilled or unskilled, and were therefore utterly worthless. That comparison purported to show that Greece had higher standards of training than the United Kingdom, and Germany as well. That is the comparison that Opposition Members were prepared to put before millions of people in this country. What do they think that that does for foreign investment in this country? Is that a good advertisement

[Mr. Lamont]

for this country? Opposition Members should be ashamed of themselves and apologise to the British people for insulting the labour force of this country.

The Budget is very much the logical extension of the policies that have been carried out. A large part of the debate has concentrated on the switch between the community charge and VAT. The reduction in the community charge has been very widely welcomed and people understand that it has to be financed. In assessing the cost of the switch from local to central taxation, we have planned for an increase in grant to local authorities of £5·6 billion, offset by savings on benefits and relief of £1·3 billion, and that will permit some improvements in the community charge reduction scheme. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will give fuller details of the changes later this evening.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Exactly how much of the VAT increase will go to the poll tax reduction? Of the £4·5 billion that has been mentioned, is it not possible that about £2 billion could be clawed back through reduced benefits and reduced payments under the community charge reduction schemes? Will the Chancellor give the exact figures now?

Mr. Lamont: It is wrong to hypothecate one tax. *[Interruption.]* Of course it is. Before Opposition Members burst out laughing, they should hear what I am about to say. The increase in VAT by itself in this first year does not pay for the total reduction. That is why other taxes will have to go up as well. Next year the reduction is covered by the increase in VAT.

Mr. Salmond: I am sure that the Chancellor will be relieved when I drag him away from his debacle with the poll tax and ask him the question that was put earlier this evening. Is it the case that the official Scottish Office estimate of the take-up of privatisation proceeds of the Scottish electricity companies is no more than 25 per cent., meaning that 75 per cent. of those companies as at the flotation procedure will immediately be owned externally?

Mr. Lamont: I want lots of Scots to apply for the shares and the privatisation to be a great success. The hon. Gentleman can put his question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is always careful not to commit himself if he can avoid it. He rarely ventures beyond the slogan to give us a specific policy. However, this year he ventured into print with a set of proposals and revealed to everybody why he normally sticks to evasion. The longer the debate has gone on, the less we have heard from the Opposition Benches about Labour's proposals.

Labour's Shadow Budget, as revealed by the Shadow Chief Secretary, was a complete and utter fiasco. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security showed only too clearly on the first day of this debate, the sums set out by the Labour party simply do not begin to add up. The Shadow Chief Secretary did not appear to have the remotest idea what her proposals would involve.

Labour propose to restore child benefit so as to give help to low income households, but the Opposition's costings assumed that the increases in child benefit would be fully offset against income support so that the poorest families would gain nothing at all.

Mrs. Beckett *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Member for Derby, South made that clear earlier. I will give way to her in a moment. The Opposition's position is not a good basis for criticising our proposals as inadequate and mean, because at least they gave some priority to the poorest families in the country.

Mrs. Beckett: Our proposals were costed at £775 million and the Chancellor's proposals at about £200 million. We are therefore right to call his proposals inadequate. I demonstrated with absolute clarity that our figures were 100 per cent. correct——

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major) *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: It is no good the Prime Minister shaking his head—he was not here and he does not know what he is talking about.

The figures that we gave for the increase in child benefit, not fed through to income support, the policy that we urged on the Government, were correct. *[Interruption.]* The figures came from parliamentary answers, so if they are not correct, that is the Government's problem. The figures that we gave for personal pensions were also completely correct, and so was the justification. The Chancellor can find no holes in our policies or our figures.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Lady claims that the figures were right. Perhaps they were, but the truth is that she put forward a rotten policy.

We also heard about the savings from the tightening up on offshore trusts. Opposition Members simply plucked the figure of £1 billion out of the air to finance whatever expenditure they thought needed to be made. The best advice of the Inland Revenue is that our measures for countering tax avoidance and evasion in offshore trusts will save about £100 million, and our proposals go much further than Labour's proposals for the Finance Bill.

We then heard the sad and sorry story in which the hon. Member for Derby, South explained the ending of the 2 per cent. personal pension incentive payment. The hon. Lady twisted and turned and gave her explanation this way and that. I give her full marks for trying to justify her point, but she was making it crystal clear that Labour intends to interfere with the contracts that 4 million people have taken out for personal pensions. The Labour party is dashing the hopes, expectations and contracts of millions of people. That is typical of Labour's approach.

Labour always underestimates what it costs to deliver its commitments, and Labour Members over-estimate what they can raise by increasing taxes. That is why, when they were in power, they found that even when they had to increase taxes, and even when they had pushed borrowing to a ruinous level, they still had to rat on their spending promises. That is why Labour will not be in power for a long time to come.

One point in the debate interested me. There has been much debate about local government finance. Does the House know what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook, (Mr. Hattersley) said the other day? He said that he was against a local income tax because income tax had a disincentive effect. That is what the Labour party thinks about a local income tax. If that is its view on a local

income tax, why is it not also its view on a national income tax? Why does the Labour party remain the party of high taxation?

This is a bold Budget, a Budget for business, a reforming Budget and a Budget which responds to the serious concerns about the levels of the community charge. It is a Budget dedicated to the long-term health of the British economy. It is the Budget of a Government dedicated to the prosperity of our people. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): That must have been the worst speech ever——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 336, Noes 226.

Division No. 100] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*

Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. John Mark Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *then proceeded, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means motions), to put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the further motions.*

Resolved,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax, otherwise than by virtue of goods or services supplied to one person being treated for the purposes of section 14(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 as supplied to another person;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.

2. Spirits

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991, the rate of duty specified in section 5 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £17·35 per litre of alcohol in the spirits to £18·96 per litre of alcohol in the spirits.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

3. Beer (rate of duty)

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991, the rate of duty specified in section 36 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £0·97 per hectolitre for every degree by which the original gravity of beer exceeds 1000 degrees to £1·06 per hectolitre for every such degree.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

4. Beer (general)

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to the excise duty on beer.

5. Wine and made-wine

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991, the rates of duty under sections 54 and 55 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be as follows—

Description of wine or made-wine	Rates of duty per hectolitre
	£
Wine or made-wine of a strength not exceeding 2 per cent.	12·06
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 2 per cent. but not exceeding 3 per cent.	20·09
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 3 per cent. but not exceeding 4 per cent.	28·12
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 4 per cent. but not exceeding 5 per cent.	36·17
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 5 per cent. but not exceeding 5·5 per cent.	44·20
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 5·5 per cent. but not exceeding 15 per cent. and not being sparkling	120·54
Sparkling wine or sparkling made-wine of a strength exceeding 5·5 per cent. but not exceeding 15 per cent.	199·04
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 15 per cent. but not exceeding 18 per cent.	207·89
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 18 per cent. but not exceeding 22 per cent.	239·80
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 22 per cent.	239·80 plus £18·96 for every 1 per cent. or part of 1 per cent. in excess of 22 per cent.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

6. Cider

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991, the rate of duty specified in section 62(1) of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £18·66 per hectolitre to £20·40 per hectolitre.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

7. Tobacco products

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991, for the Table in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 there shall be substituted—

"TABLE

1.	Cigarettes	An amount equal to 21 per cent. of the retail price plus £40·15 per thousand cigarettes.
2.	Cigars	£61·72 per kilogram.
3.	Hand-rolling tobacco	£65·12 per kilogram.
4.	Other smoking tobacco and chewing tobacco	£28·69 per kilogram."

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

8. HYDROCARBON OIL

Motion made, and Question put,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 19th March 1991—

(1) The rates of duty specified in section 6(1) of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979 shall be increased—

(a) in the case of light oil, from £0·2248 a litre to £0·2585 a litre; and

(b) in the case of heavy oil, from £0·1902 a litre to £0·2187 a litre.

(2) The rates of rebate of duty specified in section 11(1) of that Act shall be increased—

(a) in the case of fuel oil, from £0·0083 a litre to £0·0091 a litre; and

(b) in the case of gas oil, from £0·0118 a litre to £0·0129 a litre.

(3) The rate of rebate of duty specified in section 13A(1) of that Act (unleaded petrol) shall be increased from £0·0299 a litre to £0·0344 a litre.

(4) The rate of rebate of duty specified in section 14(1) of that Act (light oil for use as furnace oil) shall be increased from £0·0083 a litre to £0·0091 a litre.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 38.

Division No. 101] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham

Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McGrady, Eddie
Maclennan, Robert
Maginnis, Ken
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mr. Andrew Welsh

Question accordingly agreed to.

9. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (RATES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) The Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 1, in Part I, in paragraph 3, there shall be inserted at the end—

"'weight unladen' shall be construed in accordance with section 190(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988."

(3) In Schedule 1, for the Table set out in Part II there shall be substituted—

"Description of vehicle	Rate of duty £
1. Bicycles of which the cylinder capacity of the engine does not exceed 150 cubic centimetres	15·00
2. Bicycles of which the cylinder capacity of the engine exceeds 150 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 250 cubic centimetres	30·00
3. Bicycles not included above	50·00
4. Tricycles	50·00"

(4) In Schedule 3, in the Table set out in Part II—

(a) in the entry relating to special machines, for "16·00" there shall be substituted "30·00"; and

(b) in the entry relating to recovery vehicles, for "50·00" there shall be substituted "75·00".

(5) Paragraphs (1) to (4) above shall apply in relation to licences taken out after 19th March 1991.

(6) This Resolution shall apply in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 as it applies in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971, but with the substitution for "section 190(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988", in paragraph (2), of "Article 2(3) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

10. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (EXEMPTIONS: 1)

Resolved,

That—

(1) As from 20th March 1991, section 4 of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 shall have effect subject to the following amendments—

(a) in subsection (1)(ka), the words "(other than mowing machines)" shall be omitted; and

(b) in subsection (2), after the definition of "veterinary ambulance" there shall be inserted—"'weight unladen' shall be construed in accordance with section 190(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988."

(2) Paragraph (1) above shall apply in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 as it applies in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 but with the substitution for "section 190(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988" of "Article 2(3) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981."

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

11. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (EXEMPTIONS: 2)

Resolved,

That—

(1) As from 1st June 1991, section 4 of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 shall have effect with the insertion of the following definition before the definition of "ambulance" in subsection (2)—

"'fire engine' means a vehicle—

(a) constructed or adapted for use for the purpose of fire fighting, salvage or both, and

(b) used solely for the purposes of a fire brigade (whether or not one maintained under the Fire Services Act 1947)."

(2) Paragraph (1) above shall apply in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 as it applies in relation to the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 but with the substitution for "the Fire Services Act 1947" of "the Fire Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1984".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

12. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (EXEMPTIONS: 3)

Resolved,

That provision may be made repealing section 7(4) of each of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 and the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

13. GAMING LICENCE DUTY

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 14 of, and Schedule 2 to, the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981.

14. VALUE ADDED TAX (RATE)

Motion made, and Question put,

That, as from 1st April 1991, section 9(1) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 shall have effect with the substitution for "15 per cent." of "17·50 per cent.".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 59.

Division No. 102] **[10.30 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ys)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger

Sibbet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Hertfs N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alton, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nellist, Dave
Paisley, Rev Ian
Primarolo, Dawn
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes
Mr. Archy Kirkwood
and Mr. Alex Carlile.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Question put and agreed to.

15. VALUE ADDED TAX (PENALTY FOR SERIOUS MISDECLARATION)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 14(1) of the Finance Act 1985, for "30 per cent." there shall be substituted "20 per cent.".

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution shall apply where a penalty is assessed on or after 20th March 1991 in relation to a prescribed accounting period beginning on or after 1st April 1990.

(3) This Resolution shall not apply in the case of a supplementary assessment if the original assessment was made before 20th March 1991.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

16. CAR TAX (REMISSION)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 7 of the Car Tax Act 1983.

17. DUTIES OF EXCISE (REGISTERED EXCISE DEALERS AND SHIPPERS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to new classes or descriptions of revenue trader (to be known as registered excise dealers and shippers).

18. INCOME TAX (CHARGE AND RATES FOR 1991-92)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Income tax shall be charged for the year 1991-92, and—

(a) the basic rate shall be 25 per cent.,

(b) the basic rate limit shall be £23,700, and

(c) the higher rate shall be 40 per cent.

(2) In accordance with paragraph (1)(b) above, section 1(4) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall not apply for the year 1991-92.

(3) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes act 1988 before 18th May 1991.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

19. INCOME TAX (MARRIED COUPLE'S ALLOWANCE)

Resolved.

That—

(1) Section 257C(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, so far as relating to section 257A(1) of that Act, shall not apply for the year 1991-92.

(2) Section 257A(1) of that Act shall apply for the year 1991-92 as if the amount specified in it were "£1,720".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

20. RELIEF FOR INTEREST (LIMIT FOR 1991-92)

Resolved,

That, for the year 1991-92, the qualifying maximum defined in section 367(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be £30,000.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

21. RELIEF FOR INTEREST (INCOME TAX AT THE HIGHER RATE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) At the end of section 353 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Acts 1988 there shall be added—

"(4) In computing for the purposes of excess liability the total income of a person for any year of assessment,

no deduction shall be allowed in respect of any amount of interest which falls to be deducted or set off under subsection (1) above by virtue of section 355(1)(a), 356(1) or 365.

(5) In subsection (4) above, "excess liability" means the excess of liability to income tax over what it would be if all income tax were charged at the basic rate, to the exclusion of any higher rate."

(2) In section 369 of that Act, in subsection (3), after the words "in computing his total income" there shall be inserted the words "(otherwise than for the purposes of excess liability)"; and after that subsection there shall be inserted—

"(3A) In computing for the purposes of excess liability the total income of a person for any year of assessment, no deduction shall be allowed in respect of any amount of relevant loan interest to which this section applies.

(3B) In this section "excess liability" means the excess of liability to income tax over what it would be if all income tax were charged at the basic rate, to the exclusion of any higher rate."

(3) The amendment made by paragraph (1) above shall not apply in relation to interest which falls to be deducted or set off under section 353(1) of that Act by virtue of paragraph (a) of subsection (5) of section 354 of that Act in any case where—

(a) the loan on which the interest is payable is the loan referred to in that paragraph as "the first-mentioned loan"; and

(b) the loan referred to in paragraph (b) of that subsection as "the other loan" was made before 6th April 1991.

(4) the amendments made by paragraph (2) above shall not apply in relation to an amount of interest which is relevant loan interest (within the meaning of section 369 of that Act) by virtue of section 371 of that Act in any case where—

(a) the loan on which the interest is payable is the loan referred to in subsection (1) of that section as "the first loan"; and

(b) the loan which is, for the purposes of that subsection, "the other loan" was made before 6th April 1991.

(5) Where the loan mentioned in sub-paragraph (b) of paragraph (3) above or, as the case may be, of paragraph (4) above was made on or after 6th April 1991, it shall be treated for the purposes of the paragraph in question as made before that date if it is proved by written evidence—

(a) that the loan was made in pursuance of an offer made before that date and that the offer either was in writing or was evidenced by a note or memorandum made by the lender before that date, and

(b) that the loan was used to defray money applied in pursuance of a binding contract entered into before that date.

(6) Paragraphs (1) to (5) above shall have effect in relation to payments of interest made on or after 6th of April 1991 (whenever falling due).

(7) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1991.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

22. Corporation tax

(charge and rate for financial year 1991)

Resolved,

That corporation tax shall be charged for the financial year 1991 at the rate of 33 per cent.

23. Corporation tax (small companies: 1991)

Resolved,

That for the financial year 1991—

(a) the small companies' rate shall be 25 per cent., and

(b) the fraction mentioned in section 13(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be one fiftieth.

24. Benefits in kind (cars)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the year 1991-92, Schedule 6 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall have effect with the substitution for Part I of the following—

Part I

Tables of Flat Rate Cash Equivalents

Table A

Cars with an original market value up to £19,250 and having a cylinder capacity

Cylinder capacity of car in cubic centimetres	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
1400 or less	£2,050	£1,400
More than 1400 but not more than 2000	£2,650	£1,800
More than 2000	£4,250	£2,850

Table B

Cars with an original market value up to £19,250 and not having a cylinder capacity

Original market value of car	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
Less than £6,000	£2,050	£1,400
£6,000 or more but less than £8,500	£2,650	£1,800
£8,500 or more but not more than £19,250	£4,250	£2,850

TABLE C

Cars with an original market value of more than £19,250

Original market value of car	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
More than £19,250 but not more than £29,000	£5,500	£3,700
More than £29,000	£8,900	£5,900

(2) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1991.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

25. BENEFITS IN KIND (MOBILE TELEPHONES)

Resolved,

That charges to income tax may be imposed in respect of mobile telephones made available for use by reason of a person's employment.

26. BENEFITS IN KIND (BENEFICIAL LOAN ARRANGEMENTS)

Resolved,

That charges to income tax may be imposed in respect of loans made by reason of a person's employment.

27. CAPITAL GAINS (REBASING)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Schedule 9 to the Finance Act 1988.

28. CAPITAL GAINS TAX (APPLICABLE RATES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made restricting the deductions that may be allowed in determining the rate of capital gains tax applicable to capital gains.

29. PROFIT-RELATED PAY

Resolved,

That, in relation to profit-related pay paid by reference to profit periods beginning on or after 1st April 1991, section 171(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall have effect with the substitution of "The whole" for "One half".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

30. PROFIT SHARING SCHEMES (MAXIMUM SHARE APPROPRIATION)

Resolved,

That section 187(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall have effect for the year 1991-92 as if in the definition of "relevant amount" for "not less than £2,000 and not more than £6,000" there were substituted "not less than £3,000 and not more than £8,000".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

31. RETIREMENT BENEFITS SCHEMES

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about retirement benefits schemes.

32. SETTLEMENTS

Resolved,

That charges to capital gains tax and corporation tax (including charges by reference to past gains) may be imposed by provisions about settlements.

33. SECURITIES

Resolved,

That charges to income tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax may be imposed by provisions relating to securities.

34. OIL FIELD ABANDONMENT COSTS (PETROLEUM REVENUE TAX AND CORPORATION TAX)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about—

(a) the effect, for the purposes of petroleum revenue tax and corporation tax, of payments by the guarantor under contracts of guarantee relating to the liabilities of participators in an oil field for certain costs incurred in or related to the closing down of the field or any part of it; and

(b) the division of certain expenditure between participators in an oil field where one or more of them defaults on his liabilities in respect of that expenditure; and

(c) the treatment for the purposes of petroleum revenue tax and corporation tax of certain reimbursements of expenditure received by one participator from another; and

(d) the apportionment of certain expenditure referable to an asset which is a qualifying asset for the purposes of the Oil Taxation Act 1983.

35. OIL LICENCES

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 64(6)(c) of the Finance Act 1988.

36. BUILDING SOCIETIES

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about building societies.

37. NORMAL COMMERCIAL LOANS

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to normal commercial loans.

38. CAPITAL ALLOWANCES

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to capital allowances for chargeable periods or their basis periods ending on or after 6th April 1990.

39. RELIEF FROM TAX (INCIDENTAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL CHARGES)

Resolved,

That it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to any duty or tax (including charges having retrospective effect) which may arise from provisions designed in general to afford relief from taxation.

PROCEDURE RESOLUTIONS

PROCEDURE (FUTURE TAXATION)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision with respect to trading funds.

PROCEDURE (TRADING FUNDS)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provisions, taking effect in a future year, about vocational training expenses.

FINANCE BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act of the present Session relating to finance, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums payable by virtue of any provision of that Act requiring the Secretary of State to pay a sum by way of rebate of vehicles excise duty where a goods vehicle for which a vehicle licence is in force is transported by rail in the United Kingdom in the course of the transport of goods between member States by means of combined transport.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. David Mellor, Mrs. Gillian Shepherd, Mr. John Maples and Mr. Francis Maude do prepare and bring it in.

FINANCE BILL

Mr. Francis Maude accordingly presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, to amend the law relating to the national debt and the public revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance: And the same was read the First time; and to be ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 122.]

Point of Order

10.45 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I regard this as a fundamental and serious point of order. Is it a breach of the procedures of the House for the Minister for Roads and Traffic to circulate a letter to the member of European Standing Committee A—as he has—saying that he will not place before the House an amendment passed unanimously by that Committee on 13 March?

To my knowledge, this is the first time in the 900-year history of Parliament that a Minister has declined to report to the House of Commons a decision arrived at unanimously by a Committee, and has done so through what appears to be a misinterpretation of a new rule, Standing Order No. 102, approved by the House of Commons on 22 January this year.

Our 13-member Committee unanimously passed a very minor amendment saying that, in our view, an EEC proposal was contrary to article 75 of the treaty of Rome, because it included road safety within the competence of the Community. We felt that there was no doubt about the matter: the Select Committee spelled out—stated quite sincerely—that the Minister had asserted that, while Community competence was undisputed on vehicle standards, it did not extend to pure safety measures that had little or no relevance to the Community's primary objectives.

It has always been the practice of the House that, if a Committee comes to a decision, it reports it to the House of Commons, which can then either accept or reject it. Surely it is a complete breach of the house's procedures for the House not to be told what the Committee did. We have just set up these Committees, allegedly, to give proper scrutiny to EEC legislation. Our Committee sat for two and a half hours, considering the issue carefully and came to a conclusion. Surely it makes nonsense of democracy, and our procedures, for the House not to be told what we have agreed.

If this were some spurious point advanced by one or two members it would be understandable; but, after two and a half hours of debate, Conservative, Labour, Ulster Unionist and other Members all agreed. I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker. This has never happened before in the history of Parliament. Surely we can prevent what appears to be an abuse of a new rule.

If we want to change the position, we can put down an amendment to the Government motion, but if we do that there can be no debate, and no explanation to the House of why we reached our decision. All that will be possible is a vote at the end of business. This is a breach of democracy and a breach of privilege. Something must be done, or we may as well shut up shop.

Mr. Speaker: I have received a copy of the letter to which the hon. Member has referred. I refer hon. Members to Standing Order No. 102(9), under which the Government are free to table a motion in connection with any European Community document. As the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) has pointed out, hon. Members are free to table any amendment to such a motion. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman give that course of action very serious consideration.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Member who leads for the Opposition on European Standing Committee A, I have to express grave concern about the situation to which the hon. Member for Southend East (Mr. Taylor) has drawn attention. As the hon. Gentleman has said, the Committee debated an amendment at length, and ultimately agreed it unanimously. The Minister for Roads and Traffic at least had the courtesy to send us a copy of his letter to the Chairman of the Committee; otherwise, we should not have known that the motion agreed to by the Committee had been changed. To spot the change, we should have had to scrutinise the Order Paper.

It makes nonsense of the procedure of any Committee to spend time debating issues and coming to decisions if those are not the decisions that are put before the House. Of course, the Government have the right to move an amendment. Committees are taking the place of the House in scrutinising important European legislation. These Committees are new, and if the Standing Orders are wrong, they should be amended very speedily.

The current position in unsatisfactory and unacceptable. The procedure should be quite clear. If a Committee comes to a decision, that decision should be incorporated in the motion before the House. Any change should be the result of an amendment accepted by the House.

Mr. Speaker: I do not disagree with what the hon. Member has said, but I am bound by the Standing Orders. The hon. Member ought to approach the Leader of the House, who is monitoring the new procedure, with a view to having changes made.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You, Sir, have cited Standing Order No. 102, as amended on 22 January 1991. Surely the words

"If any motion is made in the House"

must be read in conjunction with paragraph (8), which deals with procedure in the Committee. That paragraph ends with these words:

"The Committee shall thereupon report to the House any resolution to which it has come, without any further question being put."

Surely the motion that should be put to the House is the one to which the Committee has agreed after its deliberation.

Mr. Speaker: The Committee has reported to the House. The hon. Member must read on. Under paragraph (9), the Government may put down any motion. I accept what the hon. Member has said. This is a new procedure, and the matter that has been raised needs to be considered, but I am bound by the Standing Orders as printed.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Orders are intended to ensure that we follow the proper procedure. One thing that has to be protected is free speech. I do not think that any Committee of the House has unanimously agreed the wording of a resolution and reported it to the House, only to have a Minister change it before debate on the Floor of the House. If the practice is not to be protected by the Chair, the House of Commons is in great danger.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady knows well where my sympathies lie. However, I am bound by Standing Orders as they are printed.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. It seems that the difficulty in which the House finds itself, and in which you may find yourself, is that the technical reporting of a conclusion of a Committee, which may be on an amended motion, is placed on the Table. The Standing Order is as you have stated, and the Minister is left to table a motion. The understanding during the discussion which preceded the Standing Orders was that the Minister would table the motion that was passed by the Committee. I think that you have put your finger on the nub of the issue in saying that the Standing Order permits what the Minister has done, but that that was not the understanding of the House when the Standing Orders were approved.

Mr. Speaker: It is clear that these matters need to be further considered. The occupants of the Opposition Front Bench should perhaps discuss them as a matter of urgency with the Leader of the House.

Mr. Devlin: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have already heard the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Devlin: I am sorry to trouble you again, Mr. Speaker, but may we be clear whether an amendment tabling the original words as agreed by all members of the Committee would find favour in being discussed on the Floor of the House in due course?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot announce my selection before I have seen the amendments.

Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

10.55 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required for the payment by the Secretary of State of grants for the year beginning on 1 April 1991 to charging authorities, within the meaning of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and local authorites, within the meaning of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987; and

(b) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of the Act.

I thought that it might be for the convenience of the House if I made some comments this evening by way of background to the money resolution and to try especially to set out the facts of the administrative implications of the changes that are being made in the face of stories that are being put about of the consequences for local authorities.

I well appreciate that introducing the legislation at this stage in the cycle for local authorities produces disruption and administrative costs. It—[Hon. Members: "Chaos".] Oppositions Members claim that it causes chaos, but the result is far short of that. It is only right to acknowledge, however, that it creates a certain amount of disruption.

The House will want to know why it is necessary to introduce changes at this time of the year, which is not the most convenient time in the cycle for local authorities and their administration. I think that the answer might be obvious. The Government have undertaken a major change in the balance between the amounts of taxation that are raised locally and the amounts that are raised centrally—a switch of about £4·3 billion from taxes raised from local taxpayers to taxes that will be raised in future from the payers of value added tax. We can make that sort of switch and put those extra resources into local government only in the context of a Budget strategy. Therefore, the only time that a Government can announce such a change is at the time of the Budget, when all the implications can be seen and the amount of money paid to local government can be seen alongside the implications for taxation. That is both expenditure and the method by which it will be paid for.

I must pay tribute to local authorities. The majority of them have proceeded well with their billing process. It should be remembered that, for most local authorities, community charges were set in only the first half of March. Local authorities had got well ahead with their billing. They had sent out bills to community charge payers, or had got them to the post office at least. It is true that the proposed legislation will cause them disruption and the necessity for work to be repeated, but there is evidence that it is possible to complete the computer run fairly quickly once the figures have been fed into computers. It was only a matter of days between the setting of budgets, the setting of community charges and the issuing of the first series of bills.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The matter must have been under consideration for some time, at least some weeks. As that was the time when local authorities were going to send out bills and were encouraged to get on with the job, surely it would have been possible for Ministers to say that, in the light of the review that was taking place, further changes in the final announcement could not be ruled out and authorities might be wise to defer sending out bills? If that had been done, there would have been a colossal saving in money and paper.

Mr. Portillo: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, and it may be a good debating point, but I am surprised that it comes from him. As the Liberal Democrats' Treasury spokesman, he will understand better than anybody that the Government were in no position to hint at changes in community charge levels or in quantities of grant, except in the context of the Budget. The important thing was to explain simultaneously the money that was to be provided and the means by which it was to be paid for.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): What advice is the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities giving to local authorities where the cost of collection per head will be more than the money raised in the poll tax?

Mr. Portillo: In a very few instances, the amount to be collected might be less than the cost—

Mr. Foulkes: In Westminster.

Mr. Portillo: An hon. Member has yelled out, "Westminster." For reasons that I shall explain shortly, I do not believe that Westminster is in that category. As I shall explain later, in my view the collection costs will be a great deal lower than some of the views that have been publicly expressed. Therefore, the number of authorities in which the amount to be collected is less than the cost of collection is very few. It is open to local authorities which find themselves in that extraordinary position to set a lower budget and a lower community charge if that would enable them to expunge the community charge altogether, and so not have to collect anything. Perhaps that argument will become clearer as I proceed with my speech.

There have been some wild stories about the effects of the reduction in charges on local authority administration. As a result of the general reduction in the charges there will be some delay in sending out fresh bills. However, we know that many authorities are keen to issue bills as quickly as possible and it would be wrong to assume that there will be a long delay.

On the point on which I was recently interrupted, we would expect the average cost of re-billing to be in the range of £1·50 to £2 per charge payer. That is consistent with the experience of the more efficient of the charge-capped authorities this year. There will, of course, be a range around that figure, with authorities in higher-cost districts towards the upper end of the range. However, the suggestions that appeared in the press last week that re-billing could cost up to £40 per charge payer are implausible. The Audit Commission's estimate of the annual administration costs of the community charge demonstrate that. The Commission has estimated the average annual cost to be £14 per charge payer, but that includes not only billing—with which we are dealing now

—but collection and enforcement. The total amount is estimated to be £14, so it seems implausible that billing alone could be £40.

Mr. Foulkes: Surely the Minister recognises that the local authority has to take account of the cost of re-billing, collection and enforcement to decide whether it is worth spending even £14 to raise what may, in some cases, be a similar or lower amount? What advice will the Government give to a local authority such as Shetlands council—and there may be others in that position? It is an important matter, and the Minister must give us some answer today.

Mr. Portillo: I do not think that it is for me to advise local authorities what to do, but I shall give the hon. Gentleman the options and the considerations. Although I have no responsibility for Scotland, I believe that I am right in saying that, in Shetland, the outstanding amount is less than £1. Shetland council has two possible courses of action. It could reset its community charge lower than it has—it is within the law to set a lower charge. It could set it at such a level that the £140 reduction being made available by the Bill that we are to debate tomorrow wholly expunged the liability of all charge payers, so that there would be nothing to collect and the cost would be saved. Alternatively—this would be a matter between the council and the local authorities' auditor, the council might argue that it was uneconomic to collect the tiny charge. In that matter, it would have to take account of the auditor's view on whether he could sanction such action. Examples of that will be very few.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): As I had five minutes to waste, I read the Bill at the weekend. As I understand clause 2, a local authority is prevented from setting a budget that takes the £140 into account. How can it set another budget that is lower in accordance with the law when the only reason why it could set it is the £140?

Mr. Portillo: We shall discuss clause 2 tomorrow. *[Interruption.]* However, that is not my understanding of clause 2. Clause 2 prevents a local authority from setting a budget that takes account of the fact that it will get £140 back. There is nothing to prevent local authorities from setting a lower community charge.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I take the Minister's point that a local authority could write off an amount and not collect it if it was below a certain level. If the 20 per cent. minimum payment goes below the level which makes it collectable, could a local authority then say that it will not collect the 20 per cent. minimum payment?

Mr. Portillo: The local authority would have to convince its auditor on that point. *[Interruption.]* There has always been provision that local authorities may in some circumstances find themselves chasing debts that they believe are uneconomic to chase, but they would have to convince their auditors on that point, and that is quite a tough hurdle to clear.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The Minister keeps telling us that councillors should take advice from their auditors. Is he aware that auditors' advice tends to be available perhaps well after the financial year in question has been completed? Such councillors may find themselves surcharged because they failed to collect money that was due to the local authority because the auditors subsequently decided that they were wrong in refusing to collect. Surely the Government, having brought about this mess, should at least be prepared to tell councillors what they are supposed to do and not leave them to expose themselves financially simply because, once again, the Government do not have a clue what sort of mess they have created.

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. Gentleman reads my remarks, he will see that I have given local authorities a number of indications of what they can do. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that local authorities must act, first, in accordance with the law and, secondly, with reference to what their auditors may say.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way for the last time, because I wish to make progress.

Mr. Cryer: Does not that exchange demonstrate the foolishness, rashness and lack of preparation by the Government in taking the money resolution before the debate on the Bill? Such action in respect of any Bill is unprecedented. We normally have the agreement of the usual channels for such an arrangement. This procedure is absurd. The Minister must accept that it is extremely awkward for the House to consider the money resolution devoid of the usual debate about the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Portillo: I did not sense that the House felt in the least bit inhibited about debating this matter. It seemed to be entering into the debate in a well-informed manner. I do not think that there is any difficulty in the House reading the Bill. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) gave a reason for his reading the Bill, but other hon. Members have read it for other reasons.

The Bill, by requiring the payment of grants and reductions in charges, will bring about a major change in the amounts that central and local taxpayers pay towards the cost of local government services which we have concluded is right if local taxation is to be at a level that is sustainable in the longer term. The Chancellor made it clear in his Budget speech that our intention is to produce an average community charge in Great Britain of less than £175. We have now been able to make a detailed assessment of the complex interactions between our proposals for lower community charges and the existing community charge reduction scheme and community charge benefit arrangements.

In reducing headline community charges by £140, we plan to reduce the gross revenue from the community charge by £5·6 billion. We also expect to make savings of £1·3 billion on community charge benefit and the community charge reduction scheme taken together.

The net cost of £4·3 billion is to be financed from separate taxation. Consistent with that £4·3 billion net reduction in the local tax burden that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out in the Budget, it is now clear that we can extend the community charge reduction scheme to bring in more people and to increase the amount of relief. Specifically, we propose to give the full rate of relief to all adults in a household and to provide that, where people have moved to a new property this year, they will be able to qualify for a relief based on the new property and to reduce the threshold amount that charge payers are expected to meet from their own resources from £2 a week

[Mr. Portillo]

to £1 a week. Similar changes will be made in the Scottish scheme, although different arrangements will apply in Wales, but those do not require any adjustment. The Bill's explanatory and financial memorandum needs to be read in the light of the remarks that I have just made.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): It was not clear last week what percentage of community charge payers will receive £140 back. The clear implication is that many people's community charge bills will be reduced by much smaller amounts. Does the Minister have the percentage or a breakdown of the number of people who pay some community charge so that we can know exactly who will receive the full £140 reduction and how many will receive less than that—for example, because they already receive rebates and are therefore entitled to a much smaller amount?

Mr. Portillo: In the region of 8 million people are likely to benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. If I have any corrections to make to that, I will provide the House with a different figure tomorrow.

Mr. Rooker: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I regret having to raise this point of order, but it relates to what the Minister has just said. Just now—at 11.10 pm—the Minister made a major announcement. He said that what he has said tonight must be read in conjunction with the Bill's explanatory and financial memorandum. We are going to debate the Bill tomorrow, but without the benefit of *Hansard*. What arrangements can be made to ensure that the Minister's comments are actually available when we begin that debate tomorrow? That is important because the Minister said that his remarks must be read in conjunction with the Bill's explanatory and financial memorandum.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The Minister is responsible for his own comments and I am sure that he will have heard the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Portillo: I should be delighted to make a copy of my remarks available in the Library.

However, in response to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), about 8 million people will benefit under the community charge reduction scheme. The Government set out to reduce the community charge of certain people to a small threshold above what they had been paying before in rates. it makes no difference to those people whether that reduction is made by virtue of the community charge reduction scheme or by virtue of the £140 reduction that applies generally so long as the final result is what the Government intend—that they should be paying only a very small amount above what they were paying in rates. The announcement that I have just made reduces the threshold from £2 to £1.

I commend the money resolution to the House.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister said that he is willing to place a copy of his remarks in the Library. However, that means that they will be available only to one or two people. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about photocopiers?"] If 650 people turn up to take photocopies there will be a problem tomorrow——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Those points are matters for debate. They can be made in questions to the Minister during this debate, of which rather less than three-quarters of an hour remain. They are matters for debate, not for the Chair.

11.13 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): We must pursue further the issues that the Minister has just raised. It is an extraordinary precedent for a statement to be made during a debate on a money resolution. I am sure that it must be unprecedented in the experience of hon. Members who have been here longer than I have. Moreover, as has already been emphasised, because it is past 10 pm we shall not have the report of the Minister's words in *Hansard* in time to debate these matters further tomorrow. We therefore seek an assurance that the necessary information will be made available in the Vote Office in a manner and form which makes it easily available to every hon. Member. I will give way to the Minister now if he will give us that assurance.

Mr. Portillo: Naturally, I shall be delighted to provide the information to the House in the way that seems best. I thought that placing it in the Library would be adequate, but I shall be happy to put it in the Vote Office.

Mr. Blunkett: That is helpful.

As we have pressed for changes that do not disqualify people from a variety of forms of relief and exemption, we welcome the lifting of the deadline date so that people who move house will be entitled to this particular form of relief. I did not hear the Minister say—I shall be interested to examine his words more closely—whether the change applies to other forms of relief and exemption which currently disqualify people from eligibility because they happen to have moved house since the due date. Those matters, along with the implications of the Minister's announcement, will be subject to debate in the House tomorrow. I have no intention in the remaining 25 minutes of delaying the House unduly on those matters today.

We are here today to examine the amount that it will cost the nation to implement the Bill if it is passed. The estimates that the Minister ridiculed earlier are serious ones made by professionals in the field. *The Times* today, in an article entitled "Lamont delay 'cost taxpayers £200 million'", said:

> "Norman Lamont, the Chancellor, could have saved taxpayers more than £200 million if he had announced the Cabinet's plan to reduce poll tax bills by £140 a fortnight ago, a local government expert said".

Ian Denholm, director of local government services at McConnell Douglas Information Systems, which supplies computer systems to 50 local authorities, said:

> "This could have been done at virtually no cost to anyone. If we had been told about the change a fortnight ago, we could have altered the figures before the bills were printed. Tons of stationery and hours of system time will have to be devoted to getting the new bills out."

That is only a fraction of the cost of the changes that the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Chancellor announced last week. It emerges from talking to treasurers and finance officers that the costs involve the immediate recalculation of entitlement to rebate, particularly for private tenants whose bills and eligibility must be recalculated immediately if they are not to find themselves

subject to eviction by a landlord demanding immediate payment of bills and, therefore, recalculation of entitlement.

Those changes, plus the wider rebate changes which will affect literally millions of people, will be touched on tomorrow. In this debate on a money resolution dealing with large sums, we want to put it on record that we are appalled that the Government are willing to do this with public money when they were not willing to spend the money on decent education, the care of the elderly and the provision of facilities for children. In other words, the Government are willing to spend large sums on manipulating the system to save their skins, but not to ensure the well-being and quality of service of everyone around us.

The Government, having introduced the community charge reduction scheme in an effort to save the Ribble Valley by-election, are now willing to spend £4·25 billion, plus the £200 million to implement the new changes, to save their skins in the local elections. It will not work any better on 2 May than it did in the by-election. The result will be the same—a profound and immediate rejection of the way incompetence and indifference have led to our money being used to bribe us and persuade us that the poll tax was not so bad, that the changes are not so bad, and that the Government are worth re-electing. The British people know better.

11.19 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It is strange to me, as a regular contributor to money resolution debates, that all of a sudden their importance has been exaggerated. We are debating this resolution because of the complete chaos that the Government have been thrown into by external circumstances, the major one being the deep unpopularity of a vicious tax—the poll tax. The Government have been busy trying to extricate themselves from the mess that they have got the nation into and, frankly, they have been unable to accomplish that. Among other things, the money resolution provides for payments of £60 million to local authorities for the administrative chaos. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) suggested that the cost could be as much as £200 million. If that is so, the Government will be coming back to the House with a further money resolution to secure that money.

It has been argued today that previous notification to local authorities would have made the position clear. That enormous sum could have gone some little way to rectifying the huge national health service waiting lists or to provide a better standard of education. However, the Government have argued that they cannot leak what is expected to be announced in the Budget. But they determine the date of the Budget and, had they so chosen, they could have brought forward the Budget statement so as to make the announcement in time for the local authorities to make better provision——

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): The hon. Gentleman must be aware that many Labour-controlled local authorities have already wasted huge sums sending people five, six or as many as 10 community charge bills over the past year. I cannot see that sending an extra one now will make a huge difference to their budgets, given all the money that they have wasted in the past year.

Mr. Cryer: I am merely going by the money resolution. The Government are providing £60 million in the Bill, authorised by the money resolution, for those local authorities which have been forced into administrative expenditure which is rendered null and void as a result of the Government's decision. The Government have not included any reference in the legislation to the maladministration of Labour-controlled authorities because that would be palpably untrue. This is not the fault of the local authorities—it is the fault of the Government for not providing better planned arrangements for replacing the poll tax. That is the top and bottom of it.

To make some petty point about all the vices being in Labour-controlled authorities is to say something that is patently untrue. Local authorities of all political complexions have suffered as a result of the Government's incompetence. There is no question about it, and that is the message that has gone out from this place because, contrary to the improvement that the £4·5 billion was designed to bring about, it is clear that the opinion polls have shifted against the Government in recognition of the ham-fisted way in which the Government have handled the matter.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Could he make this clear to the House: is he in favour or is he against the reduction of community charge bills by £140? If he is in favour of it, how would he have set about it?

Mr. Cryer: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if I were in government, I would certainly handle things more efficiently than the present set of incumbents. The hon. Gentleman started from rock bottom in referring to his own group of people. It is an easy debating device to ask Back Benchers how they would handle things. We are here today to debate a money resolution tabled by the Government, and we are being subject to a compulsory debate tomorrow and to a guillotine in the Government's confused and lacklustre attempt to rescue themselves from the poll tax. The vast majority of the people who are subject to this oppressive tax welcome any sort of relief, but they do not simply accept the relief as a God-given gift or a gift from the Conservative Government—they recognise that the Government are seeking to extricate themselves from an unpopular tax to which in every conceivable way the people of this nation have expressed strong and continuing opposition.

If the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) wishes me to suggest how the Government could have produced a better and saner system, I will. They could have maintained the rate support grant that was operating in 1978-79 under Labour instead of robbing local authorities of billions of pounds of rate support grant. In an answer not to me or to any Labour Member, but to a Conservative Member, it was revealed that, if the Government did that, the average poll tax would be not the £250 that the £4·5 billion in the money resolution and to be debated tomorrow will produce, but £150—that is, £100 less. That shows how local authorities have suffered from the withdrawal of rate support grant and poll tax support grant over the 10 or 11 years during which the Government have been in operation.

I find the Government's double standards very annoying. If Labour, or indeed, Conservative-controlled local authorities—the Government prefer to pick on

[Mr. Cryer]

Labour authorities, but they might be forced to pick on Conservative ones—had misapplied money in the way the Government have done, the Government would be pursuing the Audit Commission, surcharging the authorities and hounding people out of office. It reveals a regrettable and lamentable set of double standards that the Government can produce this money resolution free of any consequences whatever.

The money resolution in its present form is of some help to the House. We have to have a money resolution. But the topsy-turvy way in which the Government have gone about it is a demonstration of the chaos that they are in. Ordinarily, money resolutions follow the debate. The only precedent for taking the money resolution first was when the Prevention of Terrorism Bill was first introduced. On that occasion, the money resolution was taken first with the consent of both sides of the House. This time there has been no such agreement. The Minister has demonstrated that his statement is necessary for the debate tomorrow, and he has agreed, at our request, to provide information to be available in the Vote Office tomorrow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) raised a question about clause 2 of the Bill. We are not debating that matter. It is outside the terms of the money resolution, but it is clearly linked directly with the Minister's response. If the debate comes before the money resolution, the money resolution can be applied directly to the terms of the Bill. The money resolution is within the terms of the Bill. On several occasions when money resolutions were debated in the House, it was discovered that the money resolution did not cover the terms required by the legislative proposals. Ministers had to accept that they would have to come back with a different money resolution, but that will not be possible on this occasion because we are taking the money resolution first.

An entirely topsy-turvy way to proceed has been introduced by a Government who are bereft of political ideology and are in absolute chaos. We and, most importantly, people outside are having to suffer. The sooner we get rid of the present Ministers in a general election, the better it will be for the nation.

11.28 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Situation normal, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Opposition have said for years that they do not like the community charge, or poll tax, as they call it. One of the reasons, they said, was because it was too high. The Government, after a great deal of consultation, come forward with a proposal to reduce the community charge by £140 per head. It is a reasonable, straightforward and honourable solution. Ask the Opposition whether they are in favour of that reduction and they do not know. They have not reached a decision.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marlow: No. There is no time, so I shall be brief.

Ask the Opposition how, if they were to reduce the community charge, they would set about doing it, and one hears that it is not their responsibility; they do not know; they do not have a clue. That is the story of the Opposition for the past 11 years, and that is why they will stay in opposition for the next 11 years.

11.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Notwithstanding the comments of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), what a right old mess we have here. The Government have had to bring forward a money resolution designed to extract from my constituents, as taxpayers, money that can be paid to Berwick-upon-Tweed borough council and Alnwick district council to relieve those same constituents, as charge payers, from the administrative costs of the Government's own mistake. There is no Government money; it is our constituents' money, and a great deal more of it has been spent than needed to be.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No. I wish to develop my argument and I have little time in which to do it.

There is always more joy in heaven over the sinner that repenteth than over the ninety and nine. We must all rejoice that there is recognition on the Conservative Benches that the poll tax was, to put it mildly, a mistake, that something has to be done about it and that even more had better be done about it in the coming year than had previously been planned. There were signs of repentance some time ago. It has not come altogether suddenly. Yet while all these plans were being hatched and prepared, local authorities were encouraged to get on with the job of collecting the charge. Had they been dilatory in doing so, none would have been quicker than the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to say to them, "It is vital to get the bills out and to get the money in." Many sensible local authorities did, indeed, get on with the job, and many of them had their bills out and on the doorsteps before the old community charge year was over and the new one began.

It would not have been unreasonable to say to those authorities—to all authorities—that the Government's review of the poll tax was continuing and might even lead to further changes for the coming year. That could have been done in the context not of the Budget discussions but of the review that the Secretary of State for the Environment was carrying out. If that had been done, we should not have had post offices piled high with mailbags of community charge bills and local authority offices piled high with bills already printed. At least in the latter case, the postage had been saved; in the former, the authorities had actually paid the postage and the expense involved was vast.

Although I have no truck with some of the foolishly high-spending authorities to which the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred, I am sure that if any local authority, in any other circumstance, had engaged in wasted expenditure such as this, Ministers would have been fulminating at the Dispatch Box at their carelessness, chaos and inefficiency. In this instance, all the inefficiency is down to the Government.

Mr. Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend will know that, by the end of the current financial year, the administrative cost of the poll tax will have been £250,000 per day. Does my hon. Friend imagine that we shall be able to discover from the Government at the end of this debate, or at the

beginning of tomorrow's, the cost of administering the system next year and—more important—the additional cost to local government which is not met by the Government's giving the money back? In London, for example, the Government have given the authorities some grant, but they have not begun to meet the cost that they imposed on community charge payers and local authorities. The Government are not paying back even the money of which they have robbed our local authorities.

Mr. Beith: Ever optimistic, my hon. Friend hopes for many more figures from the Government than he will get. I have serious doubts whether the figures provided for in the money resolution will be sufficient to reimburse local authorities even for the cost of the chaos that has been caused by the lateness of the announcement. It will certainly not meet many of the other very high costs of the poll tax and it would not meet the very high costs of the Government's alternative plans of other alternative property taxes that have been suggested, which would be expensive to collect. We shall go into some of those issues —if we are given any time at all—when we debate the guillotine motion tomorrow. The issue that concerns us tonight, however, is whether it was really necessary for so much money to be wasted and therefore reimbursed.

We argued that local income tax could have been decided upon early enough to be implemented in time for the coming year. Even if we had proceeded on the track that the Government have chosen—we would never have done so—I still maintain that the Government could have alerted local authorities to the continuing significance of the review for the coming year's bills. That would have saved a lot of money in the process.

I cannot imagine the scale of the invective that the Government would have deployed against anyone else who had made as expensive a mistake as this.

11.34 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, North): As we have the massed intellectual ranks of the Ministers of the Department of the Environment present, I ask one simple question to which I should be grateful to receive a simple answer during proceedings tomorrow.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities has already been asked by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to give us precise information as to what share of the £140 reduction those in receipt of rebates and transitional relief will receive.

I cite a specific case involving a constituent, Mr. X, who is 77 and lives in a small bedsit. He is in receipt of a pension which, because he worked on for a couple of years after retirement, is slightly higher than the state pension. He receives £57 a week. Mr. X has been a claimant of housing benefit and rates poll tax rebate for several years without a break. Earlier this month, however, he received a final notice demanding that he pay the full £276 or face a court action. That demand caused Mr. X a great deal of worry, which could have serious consequences in view of his poor state of health.

The demand was followed by a bill which took into account the rebate. However, Mr. X is still being asked to pay £102 by April. He is aware that, if he does not pay, he may be sent to prison. Mr. X cannot afford to pay and it is felt that it is not his fault that the authority did not bill him until this late stage of the financial year. The authority has been asked to use its powers to remit the charge on the grounds of poverty.

Will the Minister reflect on that case? It is not unique to Bradford. Many hon. Members could relate similar cases. It would not be much good asking the Bradford district auditor whether Mr. X can be relieved of the payment so that he can stop worrying about the likelihood of being sent to prison if he cannot pay £102.

I should appreciate a reply on behalf of Mr. X tomorrow. I am sure that many hon. Members would like to know whether those on rebates and in receipt of transitional relief will receive the full £140 benefit.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I receive your assurance that money resolution No. 5 is not a supplementary resolution for the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill? You will see that that motion relates to the Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Bill. In view of the Government's situation, I thought that it might be a supplementary resolution.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman offers us a little light relief, but we should press on.

11.37 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I have a brief question on local authorities and the cash flow problem, which could be answered tomorrow. Because of the delay caused by the Government, between the time the money should come to the local authorities and the time it is now due—particularly if there are problems with the software—local authority treasuries will have to borrow at an exorbitant rate of interest. Will they be compensated for those interest rate charges?

11.38 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): It is estimated that £500 million of the money in question will go to Scotland. It would take £30 million to abolish the 20 per cent. minimum payment to all those eligible for it in Scotland. Will the Minister allow or instruct local authorities to spend that £30 million—it would still allow quite a substantial reduction in bills to other poll tax payers—to get rid of the single biggest burden on poll tax payers, which also causes local authorities the most administrative problems?

11.39 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have another question for the Minister which follows his earlier answer. The Government said that they would give everyone back £140. What percentage of the adult electorate will get back the full £140?

11.40 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) was getting himself into an unnecessary lather. He asked a question that was irrelevant. The Labour party would not have introduced the community charge in the first place. It was introduced in a fit of panic by the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr.

[Mr. George Foulkes]

Younger), when he was Secretary of State for Scotland, following the revolt of the Troon ratepayers. We have made it clear——

It being three quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required for the payment by the Secretary of State of grants for the year beginning on 1 April 1991 to charging authorities, within the meaning of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and local authorities, within the meaning of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987; and

(b) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of the Act.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY (FINANCIAL PROVISIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 9(6) (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Ordered,

That Clause 1 of and the Schedule to the Bill be committed to a Select Committee of Seven Members, Four to be nominated by the House and Three by the Committee of Selection:

That there shall stand referred to the Select Committee—

(a) any Petition against the Bill which is presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office at any time not later than the fourteenth day after this day, and

(b) any Petition which has been presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office and in which the Petitioners complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled-up Bill or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the said Committee,

being a Petition in which the Petitioners pray to be heard by themselves, their Counsel or Agents:

That if no such Petition as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (a) above is presented, or if all such Petitions are withdrawn before the meeting of the Committee, the order for the committal of Clause 1 and the Schedule to a Select Committee shall be discharged:

That any petitioner whose Petition stands referred to the Select Committee shall, subject to the Rules and Orders of the House and to the Prayer of his Petition, be entitled to be heard by himself, his Counsel or Agents upon his Petition provided that it is prepared and signed in conformity with the Rules and Orders of the House, and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard by his Counsel or Agents in favour of Clause 1 and the Schedule against that Petition:

That the Committee have power to report from day to day the Minutes of the Evidence taken before them:

That Three be the Quorum of the Committee:

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee:

That when Clause 1 and the Schedule shall have been reported by the Select Committee, without amendments or as amended, or if the order for committal to that Committee is discharged, those provisions shall be re-committed or (as the case may be) committed, to a Standing Committee:

That Mr. Speaker shall then allocate the Bill to a Standing Committee as provided in Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of Standing Committees).—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

WAR CRIMES BILL

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [12 March]:—*

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 57.

Division No. 183] **[11.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Batiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Darling, Alistair
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Foster, Derek
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Graham, Thomas
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hood, Jimmy
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McKelvey, William
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*

Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nellist, Dave
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patchett, Terry
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pike, Peter L.
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Raffan, Keith
Randall, Stuart
Redwood, John
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Turner, Dennis
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy
Wray, Jimmy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Dalyell, Tam
Dover, Den
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Fookes, Dame Janet
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Knox, David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David
Pawsey, James
Ralson, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stokes, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Viggers, Peter
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Bodgen and
Mr. Tony Marlow.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE (INSANITY AND UNFITNESS TO PLEAD) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

PETITION

Under-five Education (Warwickshire)

11.52 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I beg to present a petition that has been prompted by the concern felt by my constituents about the possible serious reductions in the educational provision of the under-fives in Warwickshire. I also hope that any such reductions will be avoided.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) will be presenting a similar petition. My petition, which is signed by about 30 constituents, and reflects the strong feelings held in my constituency, reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of the North Warwickshire Under-Fives Action Group and other citizens of Warwickshire showeth that Warwickshire County Council has been unfairly treated in relation to the revenue support grant.

Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to reconsider the level of revenue support grant for Warwickshire.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Lloyd's (Self-regulation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Mr. Boswell).*

11.54 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs for answering the debate. Neither of us expected him to have to do so at the beginning of the week, but—because of matters in the courts which I think we both understand—it was felt appropriate to transfer responsibility from the Attorney-General's office to the Department of Trade and Industry. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for coming out on parade tonight.

What I am going to say is in no way meant as an attack on Lloyd's of London. It is much more a plea for that institution to be protected, and for its good name to be ensured. I believe that Lloyd's is one of the great national institutions for good: it has protected millions of people over the centuries and brought billions of pounds to the country. It is the powerhouse of our invisible exports. It has provided investment opportunities for its 26,500 'names', based on risk but grounded in the utmost good faith. I shall centre my speech round that motto of the market.

I am an unashamed Lloyd's supporter. I want Lloyd's to lead for Britain in our drive to make London the financial capital of the increasing market and community of Europe, and indeed of the world beyond; but it will do that only if it is above reproach, and there is not the faintest whiff of anything underhand. Of course there will be the occasional rotten apple, and from time to time changing technology or abused practices will require new safeguards; but so long as the rotten apple is seen to be dismissed the market, and so long as the new safeguards are intelligible and apparent, I believe that the public can be reassured.

The basis of the discipline and integrity of Lloyd's is, of course, the self-regulatory regime as set up under the Lloyd's Act 1982 and subsequent byelaws resulting from that Act and from the 1987 Neill report. One of the most important has been the 1989 "Run-Off Years of Account" byelaw. The temptation has been for Ministers to refer to the newness of the 1982 Act when asked about subsequently emerging evidence of malpractice. It must be given time to settle down, we are told—and, anyway, the actual offence often predates the Act.

I do not dispute that; I submit, however, that, after the best part of a decade's experience of the Act, it has proved inadequate to protect investors entirely from financial disaster, resulting not just from the vagaries of the market but from dubious actions by some people in that market. Sometimes that has led to civil action, sometimes to serious fraud investigations and sometimes to internal—or largely internal—inquiries, which have too often given the appearance more of cover-up than of genuinely seeking to uncover the truth.

I must be careful not to refer to matters that are currently before the courts; I can therefore speak only in general terms, giving general illustrations. I hope, however, that the hypothetical nature of the language of tonight's debate will not hide from Ministers, or from the Council of Lloyd's, the reality of the need for Lloyd's to do

more to convince the public that it is serious about rooting out wrongdoing; if not, there will be an unanswerable case for DTI regulations.

I have constituents who have lost very large sums of money as names at Lloyd's. I have constituents who stand to lose their homes because of these losses. Most sensible people who invest in Lloyd's as names now take out "stop loss" insurance against losses beyond a certain point. But some losses are unlimitable because the insurance years when major losses occur may themselves remain open way beyond the three-year norm. That, one might say, is tough, and no more than the name should have known was possible when he or she took the risk and perhaps benefited from the investment over a number of profitable years.

If, on the other hand, reports on the escalating nature of a particular risk, and forecasts of potential colossal levels of claim, are received by leading people in the management of Lloyd's—these are, of course, the same people who are responsible for its self-regulation—and if such warnings are kept secret by them, then one can no longer say that it is tough on the affected names; one has to say that they have been done down by a dishonourable, if not dishonest, act. Their agents and underwriters will have taken risks on their behalf without the full information that was available to others but not disclosed to them. In no way can such a situation be fair and above board, or acceptable under the laws of natural justice.

In some instances, the situation is even worse than that. There have been cases where it has emerged that firms with which those in the know have connections have themselves taken avoiding action and divested themselves of the risk by passing it on to an unsuspecting someone else. At the very least, in such cases, there must be grounds for an independent inquiry. The Chinese walls that are supposed to exist between Mr. X the regulator of Lloyd's and Mr. X the director of a Lloyd's firm of underwriters or brokers are frequently paper-thin. They can be acceptable only if any suspected breach of them is investigated rigorously and by people totally independent of, and not nominated by, the market. That, alas, does not happen. That is my main complaint.

I believe also that, when there is a major financial disaster within one or more of the Lloyd's syndicates—a disaster that is, prima facie, not the result of a fair risk that has gone wrong fairly—the burden should, at least in part, be shared throughout the society. A central guarantee fund, to which all members have to subscribe, protects policyholders. It would seem reasonable to have something comparable for the protection of investors. There have indeed been occasions when such a call has been made on members. Perhaps a system should be instituted whereby a beleaguered syndicate's names might call on such a fund to tide them over while an independent inquiry or a court case was held, and subject to repayment if the loss were found to be fair.

The current problems are, of course, often the product of pre-Lloyd's Act accounts which were not due to be closed until after the Act was in force, and which were then left open because of the unknown quantities of claims. That has muddied the waters when taking a view on the adequacy of self-regulation. On the other hand, if actions taken by Lloyd's under the new self-regulatory regime are inadequate, it is surely no excuse to say that the case being dealt with goes back to a period before the current Act.

The main cause of concern has been the unresolved question whether all material information relating to liabilities is always revealed when contracts have been offloaded and when warnings have been received by Lloyd's council from working parties or other outside experts. There are strong suspicions that this has not been the case, and the new self-regulatory framework does not seem to have the capacity to discover the truth.

Perhaps most difficult of all to understand have been the occasions when we are told that a Lloyd's inquiry has found no case to answer, and we subsequently hear of investigations by the Serious Fraud Office. The key justification for self-regulation in the financial world—or other worlds of complexity and technical knowledge—is that practitioners know better than anyone else where the skeletons are or could be buried, and how the system could be or is being abused. It is a poor reflection on the experts when their inquiries exonerate, while outsiders—whether fraud officers, journalists, or other hunters after truth—find a case to answer.

Whether one listens to the Willis Faber director, Mr. James Sinclair, who bitterly attacked the administration of Lloyd's saying,

"You cannot have confidence in Lloyd's, its policies, regulatory control or agents",

or to Lloyd's head of regulatory services, who himself said,

"We do not feel comfortable about what has happened",

it is clear to me that people of integrity and good will within Lloyd's are disturbed at the current state of self-regulation.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister not to wait for current cases that we cannot mention to be finished but to call in the management of Lloyd's to discuss how better it could carry out its duties to its investors. I believe that my hon. Friend should make it clear that if that is not done to the satisfaction of his Department and of the House, he will consider bringing forward a system of regulation by his Department. A stroke of the pen, or at least a simple Government order, could bring Lloyd's within the Financial Services Act 1986. Above all, my hon. Friend should tell Lloyd's that when its friends, not its natural enemies, are critical of its procedures, it would do well to pay heed.

12.6 am

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for bringing such an important matter before the House, for his opening courtesy towards me and for his opening comments on Lloyd's. As he said, it is a fine and important market that has done a great deal of good over many years. I have every sympathy with the constituents of my hon. Friend and with other names whose case my hon. Friend has taken up. I understand his reasons for circumspection of language, which will partly be mirrored in my remarks.

Although every investor is now warned that investments can go up as well as down, and all new names are told that insurance is a risk business, it is always a shock to make substantial losses. Lloyd's is a unique and important institution. It operates a system of professional independent regulation with a strong practitioner input. It employs 200 full-time staff on the regulatory side, and none of these can be names or practitioners.

There have been significant changes during the past decade in the way that Lloyd's is regulated, particularly to

[Mr. John Redwood]

improve the protection of the names. As my hon. Friend said, many of the problems which are still causing losses to names had their origins in the early part of the 1980s, before the reforms were introduced. As he also said, the Serious Fraud Office is currently examining one such set of problems to see whether there is a case that it should take on. If my hon. Friend has specific evidence about this or any other case, it should be sent to the SFO so that it has in its possession all the relevant information when coming to its important decision.

There are, of course, continuing losses for some, not least because the insurance industry has been passing through a low point in its cycle. Low premium rates have coincided with an abnormally high level of catastrophes and with the emergence of unforseeable losses arising from policies often written many years ago.

Lloyd's regulation encourages ethical standards of behaviour, not just obedience to the letter of the law. I recognise that, early in the 1980s, practice at Lloyd's fell short of what was required. In the past 10 years, however, much has changed, as my hon. Friend accepted. By the Lloyd's Act 1982, the constitution of the society was revised and a new council created which began to implement the reforms. The Act gives the Council of Lloyd's the authority and the responsibility for regulation of the members of Lloyd's and all those businesses which operate within its market.

In 1986, the Government set up a committee of inquiry into regulatory arrangements which was chaired by Sir Patrick Neill. The inquiry was prompted by the wish to give names at Lloyd's protection comparable with that proposed for investors under the Financial Services Act. The Neill report made 70 recommendations, which the Government asked the council to implement. This it did. All the recommendations have now been acted upon.

One of the key recommendations was to increase to eight the number of "nominated" members of the Council of Lloyd's. The appointment of these council members, who have no other connection with the Lloyd's market, is subject to confirmation by the Governor of the Bank of England. Combined with the eight external names who are members of the council, the nominated members now form the majority of the members of the council. The council therefore has a majority of independent and non-practising members.

Lloyd's concentrates on disclosure, monitoring and discipline. Regulation has to protect the interests of the policyholders and the names. In doing so, it must allow the people who actually conduct the business—the brokers and underwriters—to get on with their jobs.

The essence of any good regulatory system comprises rule making, applying the rules and dealing with breaches. The council of Lloyd's has powers, which it cannot delegate, to establish byelaws to govern the society and to regulate all who participate in its business. Each byelaw has to be approved by council by separate majorities of the working members and of the external and nominated members, ensuring a balance of commercial relevance and protection for the names and policyholders.

A general review department was set up to monitor the ability of agents and brokers to comply with the regulations. It visits agents and brokers active in the market to assess the adequacy of their management, systems and procedures. Investigation and discipline in cases of misconduct are also handled through council committees with tripartite representation.

The information available to names has also been strongly improved. Improved accounting and auditing arrangements have enhanced the competition between agents. An ombudsman has been appointed to investigate complaints by names against their agents or the corporation. A names interests committee keeps the complaints procedures under constant review. No regulatory system can offer a guarantee against all regulatory breach, but there is no reason to believe that a change from Lloyd's present system would achieve higher standards or more willing compliance.

We now need a period of stability, in contrast to the significant changes that have taken place since the events of 10 years ago. Several of the reinsurance contracts between Lloyd's syndicates have resulted in disputes between those who wrote the original business and those who reinsured them. We have to be clear what regulation can and cannot do. Unfortunately, it cannot prevent losses arising from adverse developments in the market or from poor underwriting. The emergence of losses does not necessarily mean that there has been fraud or negligence, but if there is a suspicion of that, evidence must be forthcoming and then action can be taken.

The council can and does offer to conciliate in the case of disputes between market bodies, but ultimately some disputes must be for the courts to decide. Where litigation is involved, I cannot comment.

I do not believe, from what I have heard so far, that there are grounds for a further major review of self-regulation at Lloyd's. It is important to remember that Lloyd's is far from standing still. An important step in looking to the future was the establishment of a task force to examine the basis on which capital is provided to support underwriting at Lloyd's.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has made suggestions tonight on liability and burden sharing. One-year syndicates, individual membership and unlimited liability will all be considered by the task force, which is being chaired by David Rowland, the chairman of Sedgwick, and aims to report before the end of the year. I look forward to that report and support the efforts Lloyd's is making to take on the challenge of Europe and the development of a more global insurance market.

I shall also ensure that the chairman of Lloyd's sees a copy of the *Hansard* record of this debate and my hon. Friend's comments, so that Lloyd's can understand the nature of the allegations about which my hon. Friend is worried and can see the seriousness with which the House takes the matter of regulatory standards in an important organisation such as Lloyd's.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 26 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Apprentices

1. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many indentured apprentices were registered on 1 January each year for the past 20 years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): The labour force survey showed that there were 352,000 apprentices in Great Britain in spring 1990 compared with 367,000 in spring 1979 when the data were first collected, but it must be recognised that apprenticeships are only part of the system of delivering vocational training. Youth training, for example, currently provides training for 350,000 young people, compared with only 6,000 in 1979. Most of these are in addition to the number of apprentices.

Mr. Holt: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I am pleased that so many apprentices are still indentured in Britain, contrary to the generally held view that the numbers have declined rapidly. I commend to my hon. Friend the furniture industry for its new and imaginative scheme for trainees in that industry, in which skill has a pre-eminent position. Would not it be even better if we reviewed the way in which education and training are still divided unnaturally by the school leaving age of 16? That would allow even more young people to take advantage of the excellent training available in the furniture industry.

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the furniture industry on what sounds an excellent scheme. I hope to have an opportunity to see something of it at first hand. The whole House is beginning to recognise the success of youth training. It has brought into training hundreds of thousands of young people who would not previously have been trained. That is surely a fact that can be accepted. Youth training is improving the quality of training by shifting the focus from the time served to the acquisition of relevant competences, and it is delivering qualifications. According to the latest figures, 69 per cent. of those who complete youth training acquire qualifications. That is an impressive result.

Mr. Beggs: Would the Under-Secretary of State like to comment on the observation that is made from time to time that our European partners devote much more of their national resources to education and training? Perhaps he would comment on how we stand in the league table.

Mr. Jackson: International comparisons are complex and difficult, but comparisons show that, on the education side, we are one of the high spenders, and that, on the training side, the Government are one of the highest spenders. It is not true that we invest less than other countries in education and training. There may be questions about the effectiveness with which, in the past, we have invested in education and training. We are pursuing that matter actively. When answering my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), I should have added that we are looking into a review such as he suggested. Only last Thursday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced a White Paper on the subject.

Mr. Latham: Is my hon. Friend aware that if he wants to have a reasonable number of apprentices in the construction industry, he will have to keep the Construction Industry Training Board as a statutory organisation, whether he wants it or not?

Mr. Jackson: As my hon. Friend knows, only the other day we debated an order on the levy for the Construction Industry Training Board. We are continuing to sustain the board. We had a rather equivocal debate with the Opposition, in which I believe my hon. Friend took part.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister confirm that the number of apprenticeships in manufacturing industries in Britain has declined by two thirds during the lifetime of the Government? Is not that further evidence of the skills gap between Britain and other countries and further confirmation of the point made last week by the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he admitted that Britain still lags behind our competitors in the participation of school leavers in both education and training? Were not the Secretary of State's words simply a condemnation of the Government's record and an indication of their failure in both education and training?

Mr. Jackson: The proportion of our young people who stay on in full-time education beyond 16 is relatively low, but it has improved substantially since the Labour party was last in office. I simply cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not have a breakdown of apprentices by sector of manufacturing industry. I shall certainly look into that and come back to the hon. Gentleman. Over the past 10 years there has been a phenomenal increase in the productivity of manufacturing industry. That must be taken into account.

Training and Enterprise Councils

2. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils are now fully operational; and how many more will be so in the next two years.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): Excellent progress is being made in setting up training and enterprise councils. All 82 TECs in England and Wales are now in place, with 51 fully operational. I expect a further 20 or so to become operational on 2 April and the remainder later this year, nearly two years ahead of schedule.

Mr. Cran: The Government have certainly demonstrated their commitment to training, as is evidenced by the

fact that the training budget has increased two and a half times in real terms since the time of the last Labour Government. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the employer has the primary responsibility for training, and may we be assured that there will be no dilution in the employer role from the point of view of the leadership of TECs? Will my right hon. and learned Friend take every opportunity to tackle the minority of employers who continue to think that training is expendable in a downturn, which is exactly the opposite of the view that is taken by our competitors?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend about the crucial role played by employers in training. Employers are currently investing more than £20 billion in training. We recognise the importance of their role in the lead that we have given them in training and enterprise councils. I am not sure that my hon. Friend need be quite so pessimistic about the current intentions of employers. Latest surveys estimate that between four and six times as many employers intend to maintain or increase their investment in training as intend to reduce it.

Mr. John Evans: Will the Secretary of State accept from me, who served his time in a five-year apprenticeship as a fitter and turner, that the present methods of youth training have absolutely nothing in common with what the young people in this country used to receive in the days of proper apprenticeships? Is he aware that the figures that the Under-Secretary of State gave in answer to a supplementary question on Question 1 had nothing to do with indentured apprentices because the indenturing of apprentices has virtually disappeared from Great Britain?

Mr. Howard: Youth training is, for the most part, far superior to the kind of training to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Youth training is not simply a question of time serving. It is increasingly a question of gaining qualifications, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said when dealing with Question 1—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) will tell the House from the Opposition Front Bench whether the kind of reaction that we are seeing from his hon. Friends behind him to youth training represents the official position of the Labour party.

Mr. Franks: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the announcement last week of up to 5,500 job losses in the shipyards at Barrow. That followed the announcement of 2,000 job losses at the end of last year. Will he consider what initiatives his Department can take, particularly by way of extra funding for Cumbria, TEC, with emphasis on training and retraining?

Mr. Howard: I know that my hon. Friend is working very hard indeed to help his constituents. He has asked for a meeting with me and I look forward to seeing him in the near future and to discussing with him the ways in which we can help.

Mr. Blair: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman now admit, as he must, that not only is he presiding over the fastest rising unemployment anywhere in western Europe but that in last week's Budget he secured not a penny piece more for the training and enterprise councils, which face massive cuts in training for the unemployed? What went wrong with his Budget submission? Did he never ask for more money or was it that, when he did, he was told that throwing a lifeline to the Tory party over the poll tax mattered more than giving hope to the unemployed whom the Tories have created?

Mr. Howard: I fear that the hon. Gentleman has a little more to learn about Budgets and their relationship with public expenditure. The Budget announced an important tax relief on training, which I would have hoped, if Opposition Members were serious about training, they would warmly welcome, in addition to the £120 million extra for employment training which I announced the last time I answered questions in the House.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: May we be assured that chambers of commerce are being adequately consulted in the work context?

Mr. Howard: Yes. For the most part, chambers of commerce are working closely with training and enterprise councils. They have an important role to play. Indeed, in many cases the people who are in the lead in running training and enterprise councils come from the chamber of commerce movement.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people residing in the employment areas of South Yorkshire are in full-time employment; what proportion of the population this figure represents; and what is the national average.

Mr. Jackson: Information on employment according to the place of residence of the employees can only be obtained, for local areas, from the 1981 census of population. Data according to the place of work are available from the census of employment. In September 1987 there were 325,000 employees in full-time employment in the county of South Yorkshire, who represented 54·4 per cent. of the estimated work force and compared with a figure of 59·7 per cent. for Great Britain as a whole.

Mr. Hardy: Do not those statistics reveal the farce of the Government's calculations that show that South Yorkshire is more well-to-do than even the richest areas of south-east England? Does the Minister accept that our position has gravely deteriorated since the 1981 census? Will he therefore ensure that, for areas such as South Yorkshire, information obtained from the 1991 census will be fed into the Government's calculations with great urgency?

Mr. Jackson: I think that I can offer the hon. Gentleman some reassurance. I regret that the level of full-time employment in his constituency is below the national average. However, there has been not a deterioration but a sharp improvement in employment levels in South Yorkshire and Wentworth in the late 1980s. I ask the hon. Gentleman to study carefully the figures in the 1989 census of employment, which will be published early next month and will show an appreciable improvement in full-time employment over that period.

British Nuclear Fuels

4. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has had any discussions with BNFL on health and safety in the workplace.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): No, but officials from the Health and Safety Executive are in regular communication with BNFL on health and safety matters in discharging their normal regulatory functions.

Mr. Griffiths: If the Government are so sure about the health and safety record, why do not they encourage BNFL to go for on-site storage and reprocessing, rather than letting highly toxic nuclear fuels travel through my constituency in the heart of Edinburgh on their way from Torness?

Mr. Forth: The answer is simple. The Health and Safety Executive has responsibility for safety levels at sites such as BNFL and others, through the nuclear installations inspectorate, and I am satisfied that it discharges its responsibility to the full. The record of safety at nuclear sites fully bears that out. Responsibility for transporting materials of whatever kind from one place to another comes under the Department of Transport and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will pursue his inquiries with that Department.

Tourism

5. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are being made by his Department to stimulate tourism.

Mr. Howard: In recognition of the present difficulties facing the industry, £800,000 has been made available to the English tourist board for a major marketing campaign starting this month, and the British Tourist Authority will receive an extra £800,000 in 1991-92 to promote Britain overseas. I am visiting north America in the week commencing 7 April to help boost interest there in Britain as a place to visit.

Mr. Butterfill: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that, the last time we had problems with terrorism and people in the United States were deterred from visiting this country, a number of initiatives were taken in the United States, including meetings with my right hon. and learned Friend's counterpart in the United States. Will he meet his counterpart when he visits the United States and assure us that everything will be done to return Britain to a healthy state of tourism, particularly from that country?

Mr. Howard: I can certainly give my hon. Friend those assurances. I shall do all I can to remind Americans that they will be very welcome here. We expect many of them to visit in the months ahead.

Mr. Ashton: While the Government are proud to give £800,000 to tourism how much has been taken out of tourism with the increase in VAT to 17½ per cent., which was announced last week? Surely that step will encourage many thousands more people to take their holidays in Benidorm instead of Bournemouth and will be a devastating blow to the tourist industry in Britain.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman cannot seriously expect different rules to apply to the tourist industry and to other industries. If he or any other Opposition Member suggests that local government contributions to local government services should be reduced—as we think they should be—but not financed through VAT, perhaps they will say how they would finance them.

Mr. Hill: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of how fast Southampton is advancing in the tourist market? What help is his Department giving us and what facilities will be available for new areas of tourism such as the port of Southampton, the ocean village, marinas and many other facilities in the area?

Mr. Howard: I am aware of the many attractions of Southampton. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Southern tourist board is doing what it can to draw Southampton's tourist attractions to the attention of potential visitors.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Secretary of State admit to the House that the £800,000 that he announced is not new money, but money that was already destined to go to tourism? As he was invited to do by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), will the Secretary of State accept that the industry reckons that the £800,000 that he claims to be making available bears scant comparison with the £300 million that the industry will lose due to the VAT change? The industry makes that comparison because it knows that the Government are not prepared to do anything for it.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's figures for one moment. I note that he repeats the question asked by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) without dealing with the essential point underlying that question, which I put to him and invited him and his colleagues to answer.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the new money that he has made available will be widely welcomed in the industry? Has he heard the news that £1 billion is the current estimate of the loss to airlines alone around the world as a result of the Gulf war and the recession? Therefore, will he give the House an assurance that he will continue to monitor carefully the effect of those events on tourism in Britain, and the benefit to it of the money that he has made available, to ensure that the industry survives for the next few months?

Mr. Howard: I can certainly give that assurance. I am working closely with the British Tourist Authority so that we do all that we can to encourage the industry and to encourage more people to come to Britain to enjoy all the attractions that we have to offer.

Factory Inspectors

6. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current number of factory inspectors in post.

Mr. Forth: On 1 March 1991, 632·5 factory inspectors were in post in the Health and Safety Executive, an increase of 7 per cent. since 1988. Details of further planned increases in inspectors will be published late in May or June in the Health and Safety Commission's plan of work for 1991-92 and beyond, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has now received for his approval.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister agree with the director-general of the Health and Safety Executive who, when giving evidence to the Select Committee on Employment, said that there were far too many serious

accidents in industry? Does not that mean that we should employ more factory inspectors? Will the Minister consider the fact that, many years ago, it was possible for factory inspectors to go round seeking out unregistered premises? That service has gone by the board under the Tory Government. As a result, one young man was killed in a plastic baling machine at an unregistered premises and a self-employed worker, taking part in the Conservative's enterprise culture, bought a defective baling machine, into which he fell while it was on unregistered premises, and was killed. Does not the Minister think it time that the Government took more time to prevent such accidents from occurring? That means employing more factory inspectors and devoting more time to seeking out the cowboys in unregistered premises.

Mr. Forth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first point. There are always too many accidents. That is common ground—at least I hope it is. I part company with the hon. Gentleman over his simplistic analysis whereby he assumes that the number of inspectors in post—which is increasing and scheduled to increase further—is necessarily connected with the number of accidents. Through a careful plan of work, the Health and Safety Executive ensures that its resources are carefully targeted in sectors where accidents are most likely to take place.

I am strongly aware of the problem about unregistered premises, as is the Health and Safety Executive. There are pilot projects in place to identify how many unregistered premises there are and how best to tackle the problem. The hon. Gentleman's portrayal of complacency and inaction over the problem is totally inaccurate.

National Vocational Qualifications

7. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the implementation of national vocational qualifications.

Mr. Howard: The Government are fully committed to the far-reaching reform of vocational qualifications being carried out by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications under the leadership of Sir Bryan Nicholson. The council has been set the target of completing the framework of reformed qualifications to cover 80 per cent. of the working population by the end of 1992.

Mr. Moss: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that national vocational qualifications offer working people of all ages the chance to have their existing skills recognised and set clear targets for their future training needs? Does he also agree that such skills can be attained only if we set standards of training that are as good as those of our European competitors?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The standard of training and the qualifications go together. I hope that many people will take advantage of the tax relief in the Budget to exploit the opportunities that are available in order to provide better training to achieve these qualifications.

Mr. Leighton: We must hope that the country makes progress in these important matters. How shall we know whether we are making progress unless there are clear targets and figures to be achieved? What steps is the Department of Employment taking to set national targets and time scales so that we can check whether we are making progress and, if not, so that we can take the essential remedial action?

Mr. Howard: I have set the National Council for Vocational Qualifications a very clear target of covering 80 per cent. of the work force with the relevant qualifications by the end of next year. In terms of other targets I look forward to the results of the work that the CBI, in association with other bodies, is carrying out. When that work is complete, we shall consider how best to move forward on the basis of targets specifically related to responsibilities, so that those who are set the targets are able to achieve them.

Trade Unions

8. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the statutory requirements presently relating to employers' recognition of trade unions.

Mr. Forth: The last Labour Government's compulsory recognition law was objectionable in principle and unworkable in practice. It was repealed in 1980 following representations from the independent Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. As a result, employers are now free to decide for themselves, in the light of their own particular circumstances and the needs of their business, whether to recognise a trade union, or any particular trade union.

Mr. Brown: I am glad to hear that reply. Is my hon. Friend aware of a recent document from the Trades Union Congress which shows that if a single shop steward on a shop floor decides that 40 per cent. of the employees want to have a trade union recognised, on his word it should be recognised? I hope that my hon. Friend can give the absolute assurance that that will be totally resisted because it would result in complete ill will and anarchy on the shop floor.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend illustrates very well the extent to which the TUC simply wants to turn back the clock and the extent to which the Labour party is in the clutches of the trade union movement. I think that I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that there will be no turning back on this issue.

School-Industry Compacts

9. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers are involved with school-industry compacts.

Mr. Jackson: More than 8,000 employers are actively involved in school-industry compacts, guaranteeing about 25,000 jobs with training for school leavers.

Mr. Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that this scheme covers 78,000 young people? Does he also agree that it is important for industry to continue to play its role by encouraging children to have some influence on their own education and to play a wider role in the community and in industry? Will my hon. Friend give further encouragement to the scheme, which effectively means that by meeting pre-agreed targets young people are guaranteed a job at the end of tuition?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The growth of the compact movement is one of the great hopes for the future and has been one of the great successes of the late 1980s. It started in 1988 and 85,000 young people—not 78,000—are covered by compact arrangements. The first cohort of 16-year-olds will enter further education or jobs in the summer. There is tremendous enthusiasm among employers and I have seen at first hand the enthusiasm of young people who are benefiting from the compact guarantee. It is an excellent development.

Dr. Reid: While we all welcome the fostering of legal and beneficial contacts between children, employers and industry, does the Minister agree that illegal contracts between children and employers are serious? To estimate how seriously the Minister regards this, will he tell us how many under-age children are illegally employed in this country?

Mr. Jackson: I am afraid that I do not have that information to hand, but I shall look into the matter and come back to the hon. Gentleman. This is an important issue, although it does not arise directly out of the question about compacts. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen quietly to questions and not to carry on private conversations, especially below the Gangway.

Strikes

10. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days have been lost to strikes during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: One and a half million working days were lost as a result of strikes in the 12 months ended January 1991. This is less than an eighth of the annual average in the 1970s, and is the lowest 12-month total since 1953. The number of stoppages recorded in January is the lowest for this month since 1929.

Mr. Wilshire: Is not this enormously welcome decrease in the number of strikes largely due to the powers of the courts to sequester the assets of trade unions that break the law? Would not abandoning these powers lead to a massive increase in the number of strikes? Will my right hon. and learned Friend condemn the Labour party's proposals to give these powers back to unions and to undermine the courts?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that someone will rise from the Labour Front Bench and congratulate the Government on the success of our measures to reduce the number of strikes—something which has benefited our country. My hon. Friend is also right to point to the disastrous consequences that would flow from the Labour party's strikers' charter.

Mr. Tony Banks: Instead of being unbelievably smug about what the Government have done, the Secretary of State should be more concerned about factories that are closing completely, because that is causing far more distress in industry and among workers. When Question Time is over, will the Secretary of State find time to go downstairs and talk to the representatives of the 2,000 British Aerospace workers from Kingston—members of the work force in the constituency of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—who are about to lose their jobs?

Mr. Howard: I cannot believe that even the hon. Gentleman thinks that an increase in the number of strikes will help to save jobs. He might be better employed having a word with his Front-Bench defence spokesman, whose £9 billion worth of defence cuts would make the difficulties now faced by the defence industry seem as nothing.

Textiles

12. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on job losses in the textile industry.

Mr. Jackson: The number of employees in the textile industry fell by 14,000 or 7 per cent. in the year to January 1991.

Mr. Vaz: Do not those figures show the Minister that the industry is in deep crisis? Is he aware that the textile industry loses one job every 60 minutes because of the Government's policies? When will the Minister get off his backside and instead of watching over the destruction of the industry do something to protect it and provide jobs?

Mr. Jackson: Contrary to the hon. Gentleman's supposition, Governments do not provide jobs—the market does. The hon. Gentleman's picture of the performance of the textile industry, for which he claims to speak, is grotesquely wrong. He talks about a grave crisis, but in the year 1989-90 United Kingdom exports of clothing and textiles rose by 14 per cent., from £3·9 billion to £4·4 billion. That does not look to me like an industry in deep crisis.

Mr. Ashby: Will my hon. Friend accept that in north-west Leicestershire we have a textile industry and despite losing 6,000 jobs when the mines closed we now have 1,200 more jobs than we did before closure? Furthermore, our textile industry is not complaining about job losses because parts of it are extremely buoyant.

Mr. Jackson: It is an important industry, more than 400,000 people work in it, and it makes a great contribution to the national and international economy. My hon. Friend's emphasis, rather than that of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), is correct.

Ms. Walley: If the Minister thinks that the textile industry is so important, will he speak to the Office of Fair Trading about the hostile bid being made for Tootal? Does he share my concern that, if that hostile bid goes through, upwards of 200 people in my constituency, working at Slimma in Tunstall could be made redundant because there are no employment guarantees?

Mr. Jackson: That is obviously a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry, but I shall make sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has his attention drawn to the hon. Lady's question.

Training and Enterprise Councils

13. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment has been made of the effect of TECs on voluntary training organisations.

Mr. Howard: It is up to every training and enterprise council to decide which providers to contract with. I am satisfied that TECs will give voluntary organisations every opportunity to bid for the training that is required in their local areas.

Mrs. Hicks: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that when training and enterprise councils are considering the suitability of training organisations, the most important criterion is that that organisation should be able to provide quality training? If there are unsuccessful training organisations, can we please ensure that trainees currently undergoing training in them are transferred to others and that we always keep uppermost in our mind the training needs of those with special difficulties?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Quality training is the supreme objective of training and enterprise councils. It is very important to ensure that if a provider's contract is not renewed the trainees continue to be catered for. That is something that the training and enterprise councils are achieving.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks), will the Secretary of State have a look at the prospects for Apex, the ex-offenders' organisation which has been carrying out a unique training programme countrywide but is threatened, certainly in the south-east of England and in south-east London, with the imminent withdrawal of its funding? Will the Minister consider whether such organisations ought to be given special status when the general budget allocation is being made or whether, if necessary, additional funding to minimise the effects of the 37 per cent. reduction in funding that is about to decimate organisations such as Apex, Microtech and the rest?

Mr. Howard: There is no question of withdrawing funding from an organisation in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. Each training and enterprise council is reviewing the training needs in its area and deciding how training can best and most effectively be provided. I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports that objective.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the North Yorkshire training and enterprise council, which is located in my constituency, has been a very great success? Will he join me in congratulating Colin Shepherd and his team of industrialists on the tremendous amount of voluntary work that they have done to help make the training and enterprise council a success in North Yorkshire? Does he agree that local industrialists, working with the training and enterprise councils, can best decide what are the training needs of a particular area? When does my right hon. and learned Friend expect to review the needs of the training and enterprise councils?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am happy to pay tribute to Colin Shepherd and to the rest of the board of the North Yorkshire training and enterprise council. By working closely with the local education authority, they have achieved particular success in promoting education-business partnerships in North Yorkshire. I entirely welcome that initiative.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Secretary of State accept that his response to a serious issue has been shocking and complacent? Will not he accept that 80,000 places have been cut from employment training, that £300 million has been cut from the budget and that we have the fastest rising rate of unemployment in Europe? Why does he not take the issue seriously? Is he unwilling or unable to reverse the scandalous breakdown of special needs provision in Britain?

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, because we have made it clear time after time, we believe in looking at the individual needs of unemployed people, helping them back into work as quickly as possible and making sure that the widest range of help is available to them. That is why we are providing up to 100,000 extra opportunities next year by means of job clubs and the job interview guarantee scheme so that all unemployed people have the maximum help available to them to get back into work as quickly as possible.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

14. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many school pupils and students are currently benefiting from the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Jackson: In the 1990-91 academic year, some 848,000 young people aged 14 to 18 in full-time education in Great Britain are benefiting from TVEI.

Sir Anthony Durant: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are allocating £900 million over 10 years for the TVEI scheme and that that is over and above the general education budget? Will he also agree that technical training is very important to this country for its future in the world?

Mr. Jackson: I can certainly confirm my hon. Friend's statement. The Government have committed £900 million of new money over 10 years, and TVEI now extends to 80 per cent. of our schools and colleges. Furthermore, there have already been great achievements. For example, science qualifications at GCSE have risen from 41 per cent. in 1987 to 53 per cent. in 1988, and the number of pupils studying science and technology has doubled. We have carried out a survey that shows that 84 per cent. of TVEI students say that they benefit from TVEI, although when the scheme was launched the Leader of the Opposition described it as being fit only for hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Manufacturing Industry (Hours of Work)

15. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to reduce the hours of work of people in manufacturing industry to the average levels of the European Community.

Mr. Forth: There are no plans to introduce legislation to reduce working hours.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister confirm that workers in manufacturing industry in Britain work an average of 44 hours a week—the longest working hours of any of the 12 countries in the Common Market? Will he take this opportunity to congratulate those trade unions that are

leading campaigns towards a shorter working week, and will he tell us when the Government will finally adopt a policy of manufacturing investment that will give people in industry the tools to do their jobs?

Mr. Forth: The answer is no on all counts. First, the hon. Gentleman is typically wrong in his facts. The information I have is that the hours worked in manufacturing here in the United Kingdom are very much in line with those of our major competitors in the European Community. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that trade unions contribute to productivity, competitiveness and employment in Britain by seeking to force down working hours arbitrarily, he lives in a different world from most real people. The hon. Gentleman's question well illustrates the extent to which the Opposition are totally out of touch with the needs of the United Kingdom in the 1990s.

Tourism

16. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements exist for the recovery of moneys allocated under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 by the English tourist board where projects receiving such moneys are closed shortly after final payments are made.

Mr. Forth: The English—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to Employment Questions.

Mr. Forth: The English tourist board may require the recipient of a grant made under section 4 to repay some or all of it if any of the conditions have been breached. The conditions apply for 10 years from the date of the final payment of the grant. In particular, a repayment may be sought if the recipient ceases business, for whatever reason.

Mr. Franks: The Minister will be aware of the tremendous efforts that were made three years ago to secure for the Furness maritime museum a grant of £294,000—the largest grant for a single project. The Minister will also be aware of the circumstances that have prompted my question to him. Will he therefore communicate to Barrow district council the answer that he has given me this afternoon?

Mr. Forth: I pay tribute to the role that my hon. Friend has played in the very important project that he mentioned. I wish that project well, but I must repeat to my hon. Friend and to all involved in the project that it is the duty of the English tourist board to seek to recover any public moneys that may have been spent on such a project. No one involved in such a project, be it the local authority or anyone else, should imagine that if the project ceases they can walk away with the public money involved. Our duty is to the taxpayer and we want to make sure that the moneys are recovered where appropriate.

Amble Office

17. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the closure of the Amble office of the Employment Service.

Mr. Jackson: Six representations have been made to my right hon. and learned Friend, to me and to the Employment Service chief executive about the closure of Amble. These include two representations made by the hon. Member on the subject. The remaining representations were made by the two local councils concerned. All representations were taken into account in deciding the future of the Employment Service office in Amble.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister realise that Amble has consistently had one of the highest unemployment rates in Northumberland and that jobless people there deserve help on the spot, not miles away in Alnwick? Will he make it clear to the executive agency—the Employment Service—that levels of unemployment and levels of need ought to be a factor in the siting of offices?

Mr. Jackson: Obviously it is an important factor. In saying that, I speak as a Member who has had two closures in his constituency. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has visited the new integrated office at Alnwick. If he has, he will have seen what a superior service is being provided only nine miles from Amble where, at the last count, there were 377 unemployed people and the office was very small. We believe that we can provide a better service at Alnwick.

Training and Enterprise Councils

19. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the success so far of the training and enterprise council initiative.

Mr. Howard: I am delighted with the progress that has been made by training and enterprise councils. The North Yorkshire training and enterprise council, which covers my hon. Friend's constituency, is in the forefront of the TEC movement, and I know that the board welcomes my hon. Friend's close interest in its activities.

Mr. Greenway: Further to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply, may I ask whether he recalls that it was the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) who said that in setting up training and enterprise councils the Government were proceeding far too fast? Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that there are now 60 times more training places for young people than there were under the Labour Government?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Conservative Members have grown used to seeing the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) shuffle uneasily in his seat whenever the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) are quoted at him.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the decision substantially to lower community charge levels is

very welcome indeed? Does he not find it somewhat strange that the very people who, in the past, complained of lack of consultation about local government are now whining that the Government are being indecisive in doing just that, especially as the chief whiners are members of a party who for the past 12 years have shillied and shallied, dillied and dallied, without coming up with a single workable policy of their own?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts his point very crisply. It is fair to say that the Labour party has spent 12 years reviewing its policies and fudging its principles. On local government, we have come further in three months than the Labour party has in all that time.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall that his predecessor used to describe the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) as "unassailable"? What word would the Prime Minister use to describe the right hon. Gentleman today?

The Prime Minister: It may be the fate of Prime Ministers to be assailed by the unassailable, but my right hon. Friend is quite wrong to suggest that we ought not to have consultation on such an important matter. It is important to get the right decisions and to ensure that people are carried with those decisions. This is a critically important matter, and the consultation is necessary. We shall carry it out speedily, and then decide.

Mr. Kinnock: Is not "perceptive" the best word to describe the contribution of the right hon. Member for Blaby to the consultation? Does the Prime Minister agree that the right hon. Gentleman was perceptive in his warning that the Government are trying to inflict "son of poll tax", and even more perceptive in his view that the Prime Minister cannot choose and therefore should not govern?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is mistaken again. With regard to decision-taking, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) will himself confirm that in the past few weeks a number of decisions have been taken that he would have wished to take in recent years but neglected to take.

Mr. Higgins: Is my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is difficult to hear.

Mr. Higgins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he is absolutely right to carry out further consultation before deciding on the replacement for the community charge? Personally, I have always believed that the best solution is to switch all the cost of local government expenditure to the central Exchequer, and I set out the reasons in my speech yesterday. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) at last agrees, but, in doing so, is it not wholly inconsistent of him then to object to the measure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken to transfer the burden from the community charge to VAT? That is a move in the right direction.

The Prime Minister: I understand the point that my right hon. Friend makes. We are setting out our alternative proposals in the consultation document. My right hon. Friend mentions inconsistency. He may care to bear in mind that the Labour party has set new standards of inconsistency day after day by one moment complaining that the level of local taxation is too high and the next moment whining about the level of value added tax.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister now answer the question posed by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) yesterday? In his replacement for the poll tax, which is to be the larger element, the personal charge or the property tax, or has he not been able to choose?

The Prime Minister: It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman of all people in the House should believe in decision before consultation.

Mr. Ralph Howell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his bold and courageous decision to abolish the community charge and, in particular, to replace it with extra VAT. As 2½ per cent. extra VAT will solve half the problem, why will not 5 per cent. solve the whole problem?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has consistently advocated that course, and it is accurate so far as the statistical method of collecting the money is concerned, but there are important principles at stake about people contributing directly towards the cost of local government services.

Q2. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wareing: When the Prime Minister visits his constituency he is no doubt in a position to tell his constituents that next year their poll tax will be lower, albeit because the Government have increased taxation by £4·25 billion to pay for that reduction. Knowing how decisive the Prime Minister likes to be, will he be able to advise his constituents on the level of the poll tax in Huntingdon in 1992-93?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not know very much about Huntingdon's expenditure pattern next year, and neither at this moment do I. Therefore, the answer cannot be given. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that we have taken £140 off the community charge headline level. Do he and his party agree with that or oppose it?

Mr. Allason: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the publication on Friday of the security service commissioners' report for 1989-90. Does he accept that 55 of the complaints considered by the commissioners were vexatious and frivolous and, if so, will he consider extending the scope of the security commissioners' powers to cover periods before the introduction of the Security Service Act 1989?

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to consider that, but I will examine the matter in the light of my hon. Friend's comments.

Q3. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McFall: Has the Prime Minister any idea whether the poorest and most vulnerable members of society will still have to pay 20 per cent. of the total under the new system, and whether there will be a register for the poll tax element? If he does not know the answer, who does? Should we refer to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to

the Secretary of State for the Environment, to the Secretary of State for Scotland or, indeed, to the Secretary of State for Wales? To which of those competing voices in the Prime Minister's Cabinet should we listen?

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Gentleman must listen to is what is said in the document that we shall be publishing.

Mr. Hind: Is my right hon. Friend aware—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There seems to be something of a holiday atmosphere in the Chamber today.

Mr. Hind: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the calculations made by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, which suggest not only that the community charge will be lower in the forthcoming financial year but that the new tax that he proposes—on the basis of the amount that will have to be collected—will also be lower? As my right hon. Friend no doubt knows, those projections are available. Perhaps he can persuade the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to tell the House what the average family living in a semi-detached house would pay under Labour's system.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), however, has not the slightest idea how his system would work, and not the slightest idea of what the tax levels would be.

Q4. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman keeps referring to his consultation document. As it is due to be published in about two weeks' time, he must have some idea what is in it. Can he tell us how much the Government will contribute to council spending next year, and will he confirm that the poll tax element of the new tax may be higher in Scotland than in England?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is correct in one respect—I have a very clear idea what will go into the document, but he will have to wait until it is published.

Q5. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thurnham: When my right hon. Friend meets President Iliescu of Romania next month, will he refer to the desperate plight of the Romanian orphans and ask the president to give the maximum assistance to British couples who are cleared to adopt such children, notwithstanding the lack of support from the Opposition spokesman on children?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly be happy to do that. We are committed to helping British couples who wish to adopt Romanian children, and we are keen to ensure that the appropriate procedures are adopted as speedily as possible. A team of Home Office and Department of Health officials visited Bucharest in November 1990 to discuss further how to co-ordinate help to that end, and we are in regular contact with the Romanian authorities.

Mr. Loyden: Will the Prime Minister today take the opportunity to consult his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and convey to him the great distress caused by his decision not to open an inquiry into the sinking of MV Derbyshire? The bereaved families have been treated with scant regard by the Secretary of State, who sent me a six-line letter about the matter. He knows about the campaign that has been mounted on behalf of those families. I appeal to the Prime Minister to ensure that his right hon. and learned Friend reconsiders his decision.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows from what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said the other day, the chief inspector's published report does not warrant a reopening of the court of formal investigation. The position is perfectly clear, and the hon. Gentleman is aware of it.

Q6. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: In the course of his busy day, will my right hon. Friend consider the proposals of some people for public expenditure to be increased by £26 billion? Does he agree that such a course could result only in higher taxes, higher prices and higher inflation? Does he also agree that the British people want to build on the successes of the 1980s, rather than returning to the dismal days of the 1970s?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made a good point. The Opposition do not themselves know the cost of their own policies. Their shadow Budget does not add up. Even when they propose to increase child benefit, they forget to include the poor by clawing it back. Their shadow Budget has barely an accurate figure in it.

Q7. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Foulkes: Can the Prime Minister explain why, under the proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, children in state schools will not be able to study history after 1970 whereas—*[Interruption.]* I know that the Government have been dithering about it.

Hon. Members: Consulting.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foulkes: In private schools, to which the Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet send their children in this so-called classless society, pupils will be able to study history up to the present day.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had read the documentation more carefully, he would know that he is wrong. There is no ban on history after the 1970s. The hon. Gentleman is confusing what may be studied with the official curriculum.

Northern Ireland (Political Talks)

Mr. Speaker: Before the Secretary of State starts, may I ask hon. Members who are not remaining for this important statement to leave quietly and without conversation?

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about political development in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland—the Alliance party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist party and the Ulster Unionist party—and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the good will and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known. Her Majesty's Government reaffirms their position that Northern Ireland's present status as a part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one. We are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and betweeen the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to a forward-looking and constructive approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement—the British and Irish Governments—have made it clear that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an agreement can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned.

To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue, the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates. All the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more broadly based agreement which I have just described.

As the conference will not be meeting between the specified dates, the secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing conference meetings provided for in article 3 of the Agreement.

It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned.

Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. Some arrangements will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the north-south discussions. The Unionist parties have made it clear that they wish their participation in those talks to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team. It is accepted by all those involved that, to make full use of the interval between meetings of the conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. These will commence with a round of bilateral meetings before moving on, as soon as possible, into plenary sessions. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the other two strands should be launched. My judgment as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties to raise any aspect of these relationships, including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and that confidentiality will be maintained thereunto. However, in the final analysis, the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): In thanking the right hon. Gentleman for his statement, may I take the opportunity to congratulate him on his determination and tenacity, which have been vital in securing the agreement that he has just announced? We are also grateful for the imagination and flexibility displayed by the political parties in Northern Ireland and by the Irish Government. We hope very much that those qualities will still be on display throughout the substantive negotiations which are about to begin.

Today's statement is only the beginning of a process that we all desire will lead to an agreement that will be acceptable throughout the island of Ireland. We are at an historic moment. There is now a window of opportunity, when possibilities for a political settlement are open in a way that has not been possible for decades. We know that all the participants recognise their responsibility because they would not otherwise have come so far. They carry on their shoulders the hopes and wishes of all sections of the people of Ireland, north and south, and of this island. The people will not lightly forgive their elected representatives if, over the next few weeks, they do not live up to the spirit and letter of the statement that has been agreed today. We have confidence that they will.

The Opposition fully support the participants in their endeavours to bring about a lasting agreement which will resolve the dissensions between Unionists and nationalists,

between the two parts of Ireland and between Britain and Ireland. Again, the right hon. Gentleman deserves the thanks of every hon. Member for his statement today.

Mr. Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman very warmly for his opening and closing remarks. I join him in paying tribute to those who have participated with me in the conversations so far and I join him in his hopes for the future. He is correct to say that this is a moment of opportunity for us all. I am reassured by the amount of common ground that we have been able to establish in the talks so far and I hope that it will continue. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the support that the Opposition have rendered throughout the process.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I thank the Secretary of State for giving us the text of the statement some 12 days ago, because it enabled us to study it, and to obtain written clarification and a record of understandings.

May I endorse the statement, which is similar to the draft agreed with us last summer, but which the Secretary of State was not permitted by Mr. Collins to deliver to the House? Does he share my regret that the intervening nine months have been unnecessarily wasted?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that I especially endorse the phrase "confidentiality will be maintained" until the talks have concluded? Does he share my view that those of us who will be expected to play key roles must not jeopardise all that has been achieved so far by negotiating over the air in radio chat shows?

Finally, would the Secretary of State be kind enough to pass on my thanks to the news industry for letting me in on the secret that the statement would be made today and not tomorrow as previously arranged?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said. In the course of the past nine months, we have been able to secure a greater convergence of all the parties which then made it possible for the statement, which I proposed 12 days ago, to be accepted. I entirely endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about confidentiality. I would as little expect to meet the right hon. Gentleman on a chat show as I think he would expect to meet me.

As to the date of the statement, all of us were grateful to the participants in the talks that they were able to give us an answer yesterday rather than today. We felt it better that the statement should be made as early as possible.

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Will my right hon. Friend accept my warmest congratulations on his achievements in bringing the parties of both north and south together in what can be the most worthwhile and productive effort since the Sunningdale agreement was abandoned in 1974 by the Labour Government?

My right hon. Friend says that one group wants to be considered as part of Her Majesty's Government's team, and may I express the hope that that does not in any way give them the right of veto over what Her Majesty's Government's representatives believe to be right in the interests of all the parties, north and south? Perhaps I might also add in passing that my right hon. Friend's achievement shows that consultation can, at times, be extremely worth while and productive? *[Laughter.]*

Is not the best way in which we can help our right hon. Friend in his endeavours to refrain from attacking any group in Ireland, north or south, if things happen to go wrong? What my right hon. Friend is trying to do is to deal with the problems of the past 400 years. Those of us who have had an active part in that effort in the past know that, despite the best intentions, things can at times go wrong. There is no point in attacking the other side of the House in those circumstances.

Mr. Brooke: I thank my right hon. Friend for his opening remarks.

My right hon. Friend's first question related to one of the groups of participants regarding themselves as what I described as the United Kingdom team rather than the team of Her Majesty's Government. My right hon. Friend is correct to think that Her Majesty's Government would not be prohibited or precluded from any observations of their own by the style in which others would be joining them in the second strand of talks.

To secure widely acceptable arrangements, we are determined that we should maintain unanimity throughout the process in terms of agreement at the various stages. Anyone will have the right to say, at some stage, that they wish to withdraw, but I very much hope that they will not feel the need to do so.

As to consultation, I realise that that is a theme of other events that are occurring elsewhere. Having been through a recent experience of such consultation, all I can say is that I do not recommend 15 months of it.

I agree, of course, with my right hon. Friend that, when dealing with problems whose roots lie in the centuries, it is sensible not to be engaged in criticism of other parties.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I join in the tributes that have justifiably been paid to the Secretary of State on his great patience and on his achievement on getting all the horses into the starting gate at the beginning of this necessarily long-drawn-out procedure? It would also be right to express gratitude to the people of Northern Ireland, who have consistently sought a new beginning and pressed their political parties to come to the point now reached.

The right hon. Gentleman will understand that, to those on this Bench, the references to the triangular relationship have a certain portentous historic ring. However, the people throughout Ireland should know that all of us in this House and throughout Britain will pray that their endeavours succeed in bringing peace and tranquility to their attractive land and peoples.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks, and I totally endorse what he said in terms of gratitude to the people of Northern Ireland. When one considers what the people of Northern Ireland have been through in the past 20 years —if one extrapolated the deaths to these islands as a whole, that would represent 100,000 dead—their social cohesiveness has been most remarkable and I pay tribute to it.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that successive Secretaries of State have not been over-popular in the Province? However, special tribute needs to be paid to him, and I am sure that all my colleagues in this House would want to endorse that. He dealt with these matters in honesty, and with uprightness and great openness, and that was appreciated by all concerned. We did not agree with all he

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

said and neither did he agree with all that we said, but we met one another on that basis and I think that the people of Northern Ireland and my colleagues would want me to put that on record here today.

Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that the people of Northern Ireland will be greatly relieved that the vast majority of them who voted that talks should take place when three conditions had been met, are glad that those conditions have now been met: first, that we should all seek an alternative to and a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement; secondly, that the Anglo-Irish Conference should not meet while these negotiations are going on; and thirdly, that the secretariat as outlined in the agreement will not be needed if the conference is not operating.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also take it from me that the people of Northern Ireland are now relieved that the Government and the House can see the wisdom of what the overwhelming majority of people in the Province voted for? Will he confirm that the statement that he made to the House today—which is most important to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland—that Northern Ireland will remain an integral part of the United Kingdom as long as its citizens so desire, also confirms what he said in the House on 5 July 1990:

"Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom in national and international law . . . By virtue of its constitution, the Republic of Ireland has, since 1937 also claimed sovereignty over Northern Ireland. We do not accept or recognise that claim, which has no basis in our law or, equally important, in international law."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1990; Vol. 175, c. 1140.]

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I beg, Sir, your indulgence. We are discussing a statement which is vital to the people of Northern Ireland. We only have a short time and it is important that that matter be put to the Secretary of State. I know about the difficulties of trying to put questions on a statement.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the gate into the field has been opened, but that there is a lot of hard ploughing in front of us all and that there is no need for people to go on chat shows or public shows in the media to try practice scores? It would be better to get the participants around the table as soon as possible and to get down to the real business before us.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said and for the openness with which our conversations have been conducted. I pay equal tribute to him for the directness with which he has said a series of things to me. In the spirit of our conversations, I can say that I genuinely enjoyed them. As to the conditions to which he referred having been met, I also want to pay tribute to the contribution made in that element of the process by others besides the Unionist parties to ensure that the wording appropriately met the concerns of all parties.

Of course I stand by the remarks that I made on 5 July. They are on the record, Finally, in response to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the open gate into the field, and at the risk of mixing the metaphor, I am conscious that the role of sheepdog will have to be continued.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): May I join other hon. Members in welcoming the Secretary of State's statement, which is long overdue? Like others, I express my appreciation of the integrity, dedication and honesty with which he has approached these talks during the past 15 months. Although there have been many obstacles and hiccups along the way, I should also like to pay tribute to the Irish Government and to the leaders of the two Unionist parties. Although there are many difficulties, it is fair to say that all parties approached the talks positively and constructively. I hope that the same spirit is brought to bear on the many obstacles that lie ahead.

I am particularly pleased that all the relationships that are at the heart of the problem are now on the table for discussion, because otherwise we will not solve anything. It is important to note that no agreement can be reached unless agreement is reached on all the conflicting relationships that lie at the heart of the problem. The challenge that faces us is historic and I hope that the spirit that has governed the approach to the talks will continue into the talks themselves.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said and welcome the spirit in which his party and the Irish Government took part in our conversations. I should like to include my hon. Friend the Minister of State in the kind remarks that have been addressed to me, because he has been engaged in the negotiations and conversations for even longer that I have. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the closing passage of my statement stated:

"It is accepted by all the parties that nothing will be finally agreeed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole".

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): My right hon. Friend and his team are to be congratulated on their patience and tenacity during the past 15 months. Does he agree that what we are hopefully about is achieving an end to violence by making that violence increasingly irrelevant? Does he further agree that, in so doing, an awful lot of political sacred cows must be faced up to on both sides—on the one hand, there is the Irish constitution element of this matter and, on the other hand, there must be some acknowledgement of the working and practice of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which I think has done its job admirably?

Mr. Brooke: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said, and confirm that, as I said in my statement, the agenda that we shall be addressing will be open and that we shall be able to address those points. Although the central purpose of our talks is the advancement of constitutional democracy in Northern Ireland, and the relationship with the Republic of Ireland, I hope that, in that process, we shall also be exercising pressure on the terrorists.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I welcome the statement. As one of the Secretary of State's predecessors, I believe that the right hon. Gentleman richly deserves the praise that is coming from all quarters. Not the least reason for my welcome is that, unlike Sunningdale and the Convention, the right hon. Gentleman has managed to get all sides of the Unionist political parties together, which has not happened before, and which may be an augur of success when they talk to the SDLP.

I turn now to the three strands of the statement, which referred, I believe, to "within Northern Ireland", "between the people of these islands" and "between the two Governments". I understand one and three, but what does the second mean? What will they be discussing?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks, not least because of the perspective and historical connection that he brings to these affairs. The specific passage in my statement read:

"It is accepted that discussions must focus on three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institution there and the Westminster Parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two Governments."

We shall therefore be looking beyond the first strand at what might be future arrangements between those arrangements that we establish in Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I also pay tribute to the consummate skill and perseverence of the Secretary of State. Is he aware that there will be a great groundswell of good will—certainly in North Down—about the talks which may lead to reconciliation, stability and progress in Northern Ireland? Does he also agree that there is a need for people in the Irish Republic to visit Northern Ireland, where they will find that the people are not ogres but are hospitable, kindly, generous and friendly?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. He will know as a result of recent research that, of those who live in the Republic of Ireland who have visited Northern Ireland, 98 per cent. have said that they would wish to return. For myself, I hope that we can increase the number who visit for the first time.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I particularly welcome the final sentence in the statement, in which the Secretary of State said that the outcome of any talks would have to be acceptable to the people, unlike the failed Sunningdale initiative, when an attempt was made to ignore the ballot box. Does not the Secretary of State agree that one difficulty that lies ahead is the prospect of an election which would not just interrupt the timetable but might cause problems over matters of substance?

Will it not be difficult to have serious discussions about future democratic institutions for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom when it is the policy of the alternative Government to manipulate Northern Ireland out of the Kingdom? Would not the best contribution of Her Majesty's Opposition to the process be to make it absolutely clear that they respect, and will entirely respect, the right of the people of Northern Ireland to determine their future?

Mr. Brooke: Of course I recognise that the shadow of a general election casts inself upon these events. It is on the whole unlikely—I choose my words carefully—that a general election might occur during the period of the talks themselves. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] No greater significance should be read into that than that anyone who spends his life in the island of Ireland becomes quite a good betting man in the process.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, it would be wholly inappropriate for me to make any comment on behalf of the Opposition. For myself, I do not see the fact of the general election potentially interfering with the process on which we are engaged.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I join other right hon. and hon. Members in paying tribute to the Secretary of State, and I congratulate him on the skill that he has brought to bear on the process. I ask him not to be put off by the North Down Conservatives, who say that he is wasting his time. Will he have a word for them and for others in the Province who are negative about the process? Does he recognise, as I do, that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland wish the Secretary of State well with the process? They want to see peace and political stability in the Province.

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question about the time scale and the time frame in which the talks will take place? In his statement he did not say what length of time would be involved. If the period were to be 10 or 12 weeks, considerable progress could have been made when the time came to an end. Will the Secretary of State build in sufficient flexibility to ensure that whatever progress has been made is not wasted?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. As to his comments about my party colleagues in North Down, Dr. Kennedy made some remarks yesterday morning and I had a meeting with him yesterday afternoon. I believe—but it is a matter of taste—that it might have been better if those events had taken place in reverse order.

As to the question about timing, I think that the amount of time which we have for the talks will concentrate everybody's mind. I am grateful for the commitment which has been made for them occurring intensively. It has been common ground among us all in the progress that we have made so far that we should conduct ourselves in such a way that we can hold the progress we are making and not run the risk of going backwards.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will not the Secretary of State agree that there was never a way of striking through the Gordian knot of conflicting constitutional interests in Northern Ireland and that the only way to proceed was to seek to unravel the knot? The Secretary of State seems to have done that with prudence and patience. Does he agree that the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which is now about five years old, has concentrated the minds of all the parties in Northern Ireland and that one of the most significant statements that he has made is that the Government of the Republic of Ireland and our Government are now prepared to accept a more broadly based agreement? Does he accept that there has been a constitutional crisis at the heart of the difficulties in Northern Ireland since the agreement was signed, but that that crisis is now over and a time of opportunity now exists?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the manner in which his question was framed. All of us who took part in the conversations during the past 15 months realised the nature of the opportunity that was available to us. I have paid tribute before, but I do so again, to the fact that we have been able to converge and people have embraced the view of others in reaching the position that we are in today, which is acceptable to all. I hope that that process will continue when we begin substantive talks.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard to the subsequent business, before the House, which, as the House knows, is a guillotine motion. We also have a ten-minute Bill. I shall call six more Members—three from each side—and then we shall move on.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): My right hon. Friend will know that I have long believed that political stability could return to the Province only by creating a measure of self-government there. Therefore, I welcome what he has said today and pay my own tribute to him for his persistence and patience and his long-suffering approach to this difficult problem. However, it seems to me that the first of the three requirements is the most important—namely, to create self-government in the Province. Will my right hon. Friend give plenty of time for that part of his scheme to be achieved, rather than rushing forward or, indeed, putting any pressure on the parties to move forward to the other two strands? May I also——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: How does my right hon. Friend intend to have public participation in assenting to what may be agreed?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that we shall have sufficient time for all the strands of the talks to be explored. If everyone is to be asked to consider a complete package at the end of the talks, it is only right that the constituent parts should all have been adequately discussed. We all have an open mind about how we would engage in public participation but the concept exists in the statement.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The Unionists sent the Government a letter in August 1985 suggesting talks between the parties of Northern Ireland, the London Government and the Dublin Government, a suggestion which was promptly rejected by the then Prime Minister without consultation. Since then, an Anglo-Irish Agreement has been imposed and we have had six wasted years. Does the Secretary of State recognise that there is every reason for a general welcome on these Benches for his statement to the House this afternoon?

Is the Secretary of State aware that only two parties in Northern Ireland have expressed opposition to his proposals—Provisional Sinn Fein and the Conservative party? As the Leader of the Conservative party in Northern Ireland has dismissed the Secretary of State's statement as "a meaningless charade", can he say whether the Conservative party in Northern Ireland will be invited to take part in the internal talks that he proposes?

Mr. Brooke: Of course I am conscious of what has happened in Northern Ireland, not only in the past 20 years and the past six years but for a much longer period. It has already been said in the House today that there is a widespread belief that we have a particular opportunity at this time.

As to the views of Dr. Kennedy, the prospective parliamentary candidate in North Down, I had the opportunity of verifying rather more precisely when I saw him yesteday evening what he had meant by his earlier remarks.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): May I add my modest congratulations to the Secretary of State on what he has done? In his statement, he rightly reiterated the concern and right of the northern Irish people to remain in the United Kingdom for as long as they wish to do so. But there was an apparent contradiction, although I accept that I may have got it wrong.

My right hon. Friend said that constitutional issues could be raised at any time during the talks. I hope and trust that that means constitutional issues within the framework of the United Kingdom and of the Province. Perhaps he will confirm that. Will he also confirm that, in his view, a jolly good practice for the conversations and negotiations would be for the two Unionist seats on the Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier now to be taken up?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. It is not for me to provide a trailer of the subjects that might be raised by individual parties in the process, but a number of people have mentioned to me confidentially issues that they would wish to raise, and others have said that they are expecting to need to listen during the course of the conversations to observations on just those subjects. I said in my statement that those might range fairly widely, and I think that it will not be a single party that will be bringing contentious issues to the table.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a world of difference between agreeing to talk as we have done and talking to agree, as we are about to do? Does he accept that no one should underestimate the difficulties that face all the parties in the negotiations, difficulties that have plagued us for so long? Does he further agree that it is absolutely essential that the political process can and does deliver and that it is clearly seen by all that the only way to tackle intractable problems is through dialogue and negotiations —in other words, through the democratic political process?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said and especially for what he said in his concluding remarks. I do not think that any of us who have been engaged in the conversations so far and who will be engaged in the talks underestimate for a moment the difficulties that we shall have. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make it clear that the democratic way is the way to resolve these matters.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): It would be otiose of me to add to the plaudits that have come to my right hon. Friend for his statement. Apart from the caveat that Northern Ireland will remain a part of the United Kingdom for so long as the majority desire it, may I ask him whether any other areas are out of bounds? Can he say more about the terms of reference of the discussions?

Mr. Brooke: I do not think it would be helpful of me to do that, not least because we have not yet had the opportunity—and will not have until the talks start—to get into the bilateral talks with the individual Northern Ireland parties. But I made it clear in my statement that the opportunity to raise matters that people felt were relevant went widely. As I said, more than one party has indicated that there are particular subjects that they would wish to bring to the discussions.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): In complimenting the Secretary of State on his patience and resourcefulness, may I also pay tribute to all the parties who are coming to the talks? Does the right hon.

Gentleman agree that some of them will now have to work hard in their constituencies because, as the talks move from the first to the second strand, certain issues, notably power sharing and the Irish dimension, are certain to appear on the agenda, and if they do not appear in the final outcome, that will probably strike a majority of the Members of this House as exceedingly strange?

Mr. Brooke: I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to all those who, by their contributions, have got us this far—and I do not want to exaggerate the scale of the progress that we have made.

From the conversations that we have had so far, I think that all parties are conscious of the constituencies and electorates that stand behind them. They all have essential interests about which they have been concerned in framing the basis for those talks. That benefits the process because, as parliamentarians and democrats, we understand the problems and positions of other people who are taking part in the talks. The convergence that has enabled today's statement to be made has been assisted by the willingness of different parties to contribute to helping others who are taking part.

Young Persons (Alcohol Abuse) Etc.

4.10 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make illegal: the consumption of alcohol by young presons under the age of 18 years, and the permitting of such consumption; to empower local authorities to prohibit consumption of alcohol in designated areas; and for connected purposes.

This is the third Bill that I have presented to Parliament seeking to solve the serious social problems caused by alcohol abuse, especially among young children. For too long, society and Parliament have ignored the problem. My previous Bill sought to restrict the sale of alcohol to young persons in supermarkets and off-sale outlets. I managed to get the Bill through all its stages in the House but, unfortunately, it ran out of time in another place, where a few Lords and Baronesses chose to kill it for reasons better known to themselves and to the retail consortium that lobbied them to do so.

Clydesdale is one of the largest constituencies in the United Kingdom. It is a good example of "big is beautiful". Thirty miles of the River Clyde run through it, and we have scenery that would rival any part of the world. However, we also have a blight, which affects not only Clydesdale but can be found in any part of the United Kingdom. It concerns young children—often victims of alcohol abuse—walking our streets and falling victim to alcoholism. Inevitably, they fall into criminality which can, all too often, easily include drug abuse.

I first became aware of the problem through my surgery work when an elderly woman came to see me and said that she was frightened to go out of her home after 6 pm. Gangs of drunken youths were terrorising her little housing estate, and pensioners were prisoners in their own homes. I then researched the problem of alcohol abuse, particularly the under-age problem, and was alarmed by my findings.

First, let me explain what I mean by under-age drinking. I am not just talking about the sly pint of beer or half-pint of lager that is drunk in the back room of a pub or disco by 16 and 17-year-olds. Rather, I am talking about the 12 to 13-year-old girls and boys who become hooked on hard booze and stalk the streets at night getting involved in petty social misbehaviour and progressing to serious alcohol-dependent problems that inevitably lead to serious crimes.

A constituent came to see me, breaking her heart about her 16-year-old son who was a high achiever at school and was set for university. He became trapped in a web of alcohol abuse, dropped out of school and got into trouble with the police. He now faces the serious consequences of missing out on his education, and the legacy of a criminal record—a life wasted, all because of alcohol abuse at a young and tender age.

Throughout the past week, the head teacher of Harelees primary school in my constituency has been phoning and writing to me, and the chairman of the school board has been seeking my help, because the school has been vandalised and has been the subject of arson attacks. Everyone knows that those acts were probably carried out by kids under the influence of alcohol. When I am asked what the police are doing about the problem, regrettably I have to say, "Not enough"—or, in the phrase of the magician Paul Daniels, "Not a lot."

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

Strathclyde police force is the second largest in the United Kingdom; second only to the London Metropolitan force. In 1990, only 68 kids were charged with consuming alcohol under age. Strathclyde covers half of Scotland, but there were only 68 prosecutions for under-age drinking, which would seem to tell us that there is not a problem.

My police division takes in my Clydesdale constituency and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). It covers an area of 700 square miles and has a population of more than 250,000. In 1990, two youngsters were charge with under-age drinking.

I contrast that with the numbers of convictions for other crimes in the Strathclyde police area. My district has the highest levels of offences of being drunk and incapable, for which there were 592 prosecutions. For petty assaults there were 18,013 prosecutions, for serious assault there were 300 prosecutions. There were 2,865 prosecutions for thefts of motor vehicles, and for vandalism there were a breathtaking 3,634. Everyone knows that all those crimes are largely alcohol-related, either directly or indirectly, but the figures do not show the number of convictions in each category involving young boys and girls. The fact that those statistics are not kept says more about the apathy of society towards the problem.

The question that I am repeatedly asked is why, if society deems it bad for children to drink alcohol in pubs and other licensed premises, the law turns a blind eye to them drinking outside the pub door, in our streets and play parks. I do not say that prohibition is an easy option—it is not. I do not kid myself that making it an offence to drink under the age of 18 will make the problem go away. Education is important, but we must legislate to address the problem, and back it up with education on the dangers of alcohol and the need for a sensible approach towards introducing teenagers to responsible drinking within social disciplines.

I have seen too many lives wasted, too many families broken up and too many communities terrorised because of drink. The Bill attempts to save hundreds of thousands of young lives of kids who will achieve better things for themselves. It will provide freedom from the evils of alcohol abuse. Alcoholism does not respect social boundaries. The Bill is an important measure to help pull young people back from the abyss of despair. It will give councils the powers to designate non-drinking areas, take alcohol off the streets and out of our children's play areas. Pensioners will feel safer in their homes and children will be able to play in the streets and play parks. The Bill seeks to take alcoholism off the street. It will help both the abuser and the abused, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. James Wallace, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Adam Ingram, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Michael J. Martin, Mr. Thomas Graham, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Mr. George Robertson.

YOUNG PERSONS (ALCOHOL ABUSE) ETC.

Mr. Jimmy Hood accordingly presented a Bill to make illegal the consumption of alcohol by young persons under the age of 18 years, and the permitting of such consumption; to empower local authorities to prohibit consumption of alcohol in designated areas; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 April and to be printed. [Bill 124.]

Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill (Allocation of Time)

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill (Allocation of Time) motion. I call the Leader of the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. Could you indicate whether you have selected our amendments?

Mr. Speaker: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I should have announced that I have indeed selected amendment (a) in the name of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and his hon. Friends.

4.20 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill—

Second Reading

1. The proceedings on Second Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

Committee, Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings in Committee and on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion seven hours after the commencement of the proceedings on Second Reading or, if earlier, at 2.30 a.m.

Proceedings on going into Committee

3. When the Bill has been read a second time it shall, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put and Mr. Speaker shall forthwith leave the chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

4. On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill, as amended, without any Question being put.

Order of Proceedings

5. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings in Committee or on consideration are taken.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, any proceedings on the Bill at this day's sitting shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

7. Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at this day's sitting.

Conclusion of proceedings

8.—(1) This paragraph applies in relation to any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order at this day's sitting.

(2) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) If a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time; and

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Lords Amendments

9.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed in one day's sitting and shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(2) The Question that the Lords Amendments be considered forthwith shall be put forthwith.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with this paragraph—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the question on any further Amendment of the said Lords Amendment made by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion moved by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the said Lords Amendment, or as the case may be, in the said Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(iii) put forthwith with respect to each Amendment designated by Mr. Speaker which has not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Amendment; and

(iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(c) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to that Lords Amendment.

(4) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (3) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

[Mr. John MacGregor]

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

10. Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

11.—(1) The proceedings on any such further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(2) For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conlusion—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

(ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by Mr. Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal: and

(iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

12.—(1) Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

13.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and on the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Supplemental orders

14.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on this day or the following day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

15. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with after the completion of all proceedings.

Recommittal

16.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages, respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Business Committee

17. Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

The House will know that I would not move a timetable motion without very good reasons. My right hon. Friends and I believe that it is of great importance to local authorities and to all community charge payers for Parliament to pass this legislation quickly. This will ensure that the arrangements can be put in place before the start of the new financial year so that the considerable benefits, a reduction of £140 per community charge payer, can be fed through as quickly as possible. That is the main reason for the procedure that I propose.

This procedure is very much what local authorities would wish in order to make their planning arrangements before the financial year begins. It is certainly in the interests of all community charge payers for us to move quickly on these arrangements, and it will be interesting to see whether the Opposition opposes the £140 community charge reduction, which is the main object of the Bill.

Mr. Beith: Can the Leader of the House say what attempt he made to secure the agreement of all the parties that the Bill should proceed quickly, and whether he was given any indication that no such consent would be given by any party in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: To be fair, I must tell hon. Members that it was our decision because we felt that it was essential to get the Bill through before the start of the new financial year. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he agrees with the Bill and is willing to see it go through quickly, I am delighted. To get it through this week, it is necessary to take the steps that I propose, and I shall shortly say more about that. The proposed legislation is short, specific and confined to the one purpose that I have outlined. It does not need prolonged debate. Clearly, there are good reasons in favour of the procedure that I propose.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Could my right hon. Friend identify any Bill in the history of this Parliament, or any Parliament, that has been guillotined before its Second Reading?

Mr. MacGregor: I am clearly anticipating questions that will be asked, because I shall shortly come to that issue.

The Bill is short and straightforward. It fulfils the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last Tuesday to reduce the burden of paying for local services that currently falls on local taxpayers. Our objective is to change the balance between local and national taxpayers, and this short Bill will enable us to do that by two means. I shall not go into detail because that is clearly for Second Reading.

Firstly, the Bill provides for community charges for 1991-92 to be reduced by £140, or to zero where the charge set is less than that figure, on the day after the Bill is enacted. Secondly, it provides for grant to be repaid to authorities in compensation for charge income forgone and to meet any extra administrative costs. Until charge

payers receive a charge bill reflecting the reduced charges, their liability to pay any 1991-92 charges will be suspended.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dumfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I thought that the Leader of the House would give reasons for the guillotine motion rather than make a Second Reading speech. If we are on Second Reading, we should be told.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing that is out of order. The hon. Gentleman could put a question to the Leader of the House about what he is saying, but it is not out of order.

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is not listening, because I have given reasons for the need for speed in getting the legislation through. I am sorry if I put the reasons so succinctly that the hon. Gentleman did not take them on board. There are two straightforward reasons. One is to get the arrangements in place before the start of the financial year, because that is what local authorities want, and the second is to get the community charge reduction through to community charge payers. As I have said, it is a short Bill and we shall go into its detail on Second Reading.

Mr. Douglas: We have all read the Bill and we know that it is the Save our Skins (Tory Government) Bill. If that is all that the right hon. Gentleman can say in favour of a guillotine motion, he should just sit down.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall sit down before long, because it is clear what this is all about. The Bill is simple and that is why I can justify it fairly shortly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Before the right hon. Gentleman tries to convince the House that there will be a £140 reduction for every poll tax payer, and before we get to Second Reading or the Committee stage, let us get some facts straight. The £140 will go to those who are not getting transitional relief, those who have to pay more than the 20 per cent. minimum and some others in between. The net result is that the poorest among poll tax payers will not get a £140 reduction. The money will go only to those at the top end of the income scale. The Leader of the House should stop saying that everyone will get a £140 reduction, because that is not so.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to explore matters that should be considered on Second Reading. I shall try to avoid the temptation, or at least to deal with it briefly. The whole point of the community charge reduction scheme is clear and simple. It is to deal with the increase in the community charge. However, if that £140 makes the increase disappear, one cannot pay the same amount of money twice.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made clear in his statement last Thursday, the Government are revising the profile of payment from the non-domestic rates pool to ensure that these proposals have no significant effect on authorities' cash flow. That is the purpose of the Bill, which is straightforward and short. The time that we are giving to debate the Bill, in addition to the time made available in the Budget debates, is surely adequate for such a short and straightforward Bill.

I come now to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). The House will be aware that there are several precedents for taking all stages of a Bill in one day.

Mr. Beith: Not with a guillotine.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is again anticipating what I am about to say. Examples are the Finance (Income Tax Reliefs) Bill, which went through on 17 November 1977, and the Pensioners Payments Bill, which went through on 13 November 1978. I accept that they were not guillotined, partly because there was general agreement about their purposes. Judging by the lack of a vote on the money resolution last night, there may be agreement today. I do not know, but if not, I nevertheless rest my case on the points that I have already made about the urgency of getting the arrangements in place. That urgency, and the desirability of the Bill from the point of view both of community charge payers and of local authorities, justify the procedure.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): It may be that not much in the timetable motion divides the Leader of the House and me. I try to learn while I am here, and precedents can be very useful. If I agree to support the right hon. Gentleman today, will he give me a guarantee that, under a future Labour Government, if I introduce a Bill, to go through in one day, to abolish the House of Lords or to give a Labour Secretary of State for Trade and Industry widespread powers to nationalise any company that he wants to nationalise provided that we have a one-and-a-half-hour debate at 10.30 pm, he will do then what he wants us to do now?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is now learning from this place. The question that he raises is not only hypothetical but unrealistic. It is hard to believe that there will be a future Labour Government, and even harder to believe that the hon. Gentleman will be in a position to introduce such measures. I shall give no such guarantee. Unlike the measures that the hon. Gentleman suggested, the Bill is short and simple. If there turns out to be agreement on the Bill, the procedure will be right for the reason that I keep stressing—the need to get the arrangements in place quickly.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The Leader of the House referred to the money resolution debate last night, the *Official Report* of which is not yet available. As there is for every late-night debate, there is in the Library a copy of *Hansard's* transcript of the unpublished proceedings. Unlike the statement in the Vote Office from the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, Hansard's transcript shows clearly that the Minister repeated, two paragraphs apart and on two different pages, so it could not have been a slip of the tongue, that only 8 million people will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. Before the debate continues, we should have a full transcript, taken down by the *Hansard* Reporters, of that 45-minute debate rather than only what the Minister chooses to put in his statement in the Vote Office.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that, in last night's debate, my hon. Friend said that he thought that that

[Mr. MacGregor]

would be the figure and that if he was wrong he would produce the right figure today. That is a Second Reading point, and I am sure that it will be debated then.

The way in which we propose to deal with the Bill is, I believe, for the general convenience of the House, and it is procedurally in order. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be anxious to ensure a properly constructed and constructive debate. I have concluded that, all things considered, taking into account the need to get the Bill through Parliament before the end of this week and the need to have an orderly debate, a timetable motion is the most sensible way forward.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: My right hon. Friend said that he would deal with the precedent point. Is he saying that there is a precedent for guillotining a Bill before it has had its Second Reading, or is he saying that there is no precedent? My right hon. Friend ought to outline more clearly, if he says that there is no precedent, why he thinks it right to mount such a monumental attack on the right of hon. Members to discuss a measure and to hold true to their electorate by properly discussing it.

Mr. MacGregor: Let me make it absolutely clear to my hon. Friend that I thought that I had done so. It is necessary to get the Bill through both Houses of Parliament by the end of this week, for the reasons that I have already given. There is not a great deal of time to complete the process. That is why we are proceeding with a timetable motion. At the end of the debate it will be for the House to judge whether the objectives involved in the procedure, and the procedure itself, are right. My hon. Friend referred to the general public. I believe that they will accept the argument that it is highly desirable that the community charge reduction scheme—and the £140 reduction—should be in place in time for the next financial year. If my hon. Friend agrees with that objective—this, I believe, is the only way we can achieve it—I hope that we shall have his support in the Division Lobby.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Apart from the Second Reading problems, 43 amendments have been selected for discussion. The Bill was published at 8.40 pm on Thursday and we had only half an hour on Friday to table unstarred amendments. In different circumstances, more amendments might have been tabled. There will be a great deal of argument and discussion on Second Reading; the Bill will not be generally accepted. The argument and discussion led to the tabling of the starred amendments. Why have the Government not provided the House with a decent opportunity to debate this measure, including the amendments that are to be debated in Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly hope that we shall do that. I said on Thursday during business questions that this is a short Bill and that I hoped that those who are interested in doing so would move with speed to table amendments. That they have done. The selected amendments, including starred amendments, are being taken in nine groups.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I explain briefly what the different sections of the timetable motion achieve. There will be three hours allowed for Second Reading, counting from the time at which Second Reading gets under way. The remaining stages of the Bill will then be completed seven hours after the commencement of Second Reading or, if earlier, at 2.30 am. The effect of this will be that, if the Second Reading runs for the full three hours, there will be four hours for the remaining stages. There will be the usual provisions for disposing of outstanding questions when the knife falls at the end of the day.

Paragraph 9 of the motion provides for Commons consideration of Lords amendments to be completed in one hour. Other sections deal with further messages from the Lords. The question that the Lords message is to be considered must be put without debate, and one hour will then be allowed for dealing with the message.

This afternoon, I have to chair a meeting of the Services Committee that is to deal with a number of important issues affecting the House. I hope that the House will forgive me if I and my hon. Friend—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"]—the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I hope that we shall be forgiven if for a short time we go and deal with one or two matters that are of importance to the House. However, I shall certainly ensure that all the points made during the brief period that I am away are relayed to me, and I hope to be able to respond to those points that need to be dealt with.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Just before the Leader of the House moves on from the timetable motion, can he tell us whether the Government intend to table any manuscript amendments on Report?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that the answer is no. I believe that local authorities and charge payers will wish Parliament to pass this legislation quickly so that they know where they stand before the start of the new financial year. That is why it is right that the Bill should be taken through all its stages in both Houses with all speed.

4.34 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The House faces a familiar scene. Once more, a Tory Government are making a fiasco of local Government finance. Yet again a guillotine motion is enforced as, in a panic, the Government intend to use between £4 billion and £5 billion of taxpayers' money in a doomed attempt to buy off the widespread and implacable people's opposition to the poll tax—a tax which should never have been introduced in the first place. Not only was the poll tax unprecedented: the way it was handled in the House was unprecedented, as is the way in which the Leader of the House is proposing to deal with the business today. It is an unenviable record for any Government.

Three years ago, in the face of all the evidence and in the teeth of virtually universal opposition, the Government guillotined the poll tax in. Now the same discredited bunch who forced that grotesquely unfair, inefficient and capricious tax on Parliament and people want to be rid of it. They guillotined it in and now they want to guillotine it out—no wonder Disraeli described the Tory party as organised hypocrisy.

One thing is clear: the Government do not care about proper scrutiny of public money, if they ever did. They are prepared to enforce unprecedented procedures on the House of Commons. No other Government of any party have treated a Bill of this nature in such peremptory fashion.

Mr. Beith: Or any Bill.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is right—no other Government have treated any Bill in this way. It is a disgrace to Parliamentary democracy.

For the Government, this is not the time for care, scrutiny or good administration. As so often, for them it is the time to put the Tory party first. This is a save the Tories' skins Bill, and the 14th fundamental change in local Government finance that they have produced. They have got it wrong time after time, and we have no confidence in their ability to get it right this time.

The Leader of the House asks us to accept a motion to force the Bill through in a single sitting. The sole aim of the Bill is to fix poll tax levels for one year—it is not so much an expedient from the Government as government by expedient.

It is instructive to reflect on just a few of the things that supporters of the poll tax had to say about it in a similar debate three years ago. On Third Reading, the present Secretary of State for Employment, then Minister for Local Government, said:

"It is reform that will be good for local communities, good for local government and good for the people of this country."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1988; Vol. 132, c. 149.]

In a Department of the Environment press release on 13 January 1988, he said:

"The majority of households will in fact gain from these proposals."

He said that he was heartened by the support that he was receiving during his nationwide tour promoting the poll tax proposals. Last October, his successor, who was in the Chamber until a few moments ago, claimed at the Tory party conference that

"poll tax would turn out to be a vote winner".

But he did not say for whom—so much for the Government's monumental misjudgment.

Last November, the Minister for Local Government said of the poll tax review:

"That review is now complete."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 568.]

Yet here we are again. As the Government stumbled on into a quagmire of their own arrogance and incompetence, the scrappers' hero from Henley, whom I am pleased to see in his place, appeared to challenge the orthodox Tory view. The Government fell apart, and the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) fell into the abyss. On one side was the "scrap the poll tax" gang, led by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). On the other side was the Tory party equivalent of the flat earth society, searching for a champion. They sent for "Gentleman John", in gumboil retreat in Huntingdon at the time.

The exchanges at that time, too, make interesting reading. The Secretary of State for the Environment, now Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, is reported in *The Guardian* of 16 November 1990 as having said:

"A poll tax review does not necessarily solve some rather difficult problems. Perhaps Michael has some way of coping with these problems which he has not yet told us about."

The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, said:

"Resources pre-empted by shifting education spending to central government could not be spent on health, pensions, defence or other problem claims on the public purse."

He went on:

"I don't know what we will have to do, and neither does anyone else."

Dithering had set in. We saw it again at Question Time today. The Prime Minister has become the political equivalent of Mavis Riley of "Coronation Street" fame who, when faced with a difficult question, unfailingly replies, "Oh, I don't really know."

Last Thursday, we were told that the poll tax was dead. Or was it? The monster had been decapitated, only to reappear, like the Hydra, with three heads—the property poll tax with a VAT surcharge into the bargain. Once more the Government pretended to be united. But soft,

"the isle is full of noises"

—and a lot of them are coming from the direction of Blaby. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) denounced the new proposals as "son of poll tax", and made it clear, as we do, that those who cannot choose cannot govern. When the right hon. Member for Finchley was forced out, we all knew that there would be a power vacuum. It is now clear that there is a policy vacuum too. The Government have lost their way and, in the words of the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby, they are using consultation as a substitute for government.

The Government are not only dithering about the poll tax. In every policy area, they seem positively transfixed —trapped like startled rabbits in the headlights of an oncoming car—with one hand on the redundant ideology of the past 12 years while the other desperately clutches at any strand of Labour policy it can possibly grab.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The hon. Gentleman accuses the Government of dithering, but that is precisely the opposite of what the Government are doing. They are seeking to transfer £4·25 billion from the national Exchequer to local government as fast as possible. We shall be here for a long time today. If, by some mischance, the Labour party were to form the next Government, would it claw back that £4·25 billion? We should like to know now.

Dr. Cunningham: We shall inherit the tax base that the Tory Government bequeath to us when they are defeated.

In a passing imitation of Senator Joe Biden, the Prime Minister superficially parrots the language of Labour's programme for the 1990s, but he dare not endorse the reality of our policies, including the complete abolition of poll tax, because to do so would be to tear his Government and his party apart. The simple fact is that the Prime Minister is a man who does not have the faintest idea where he is going—like this proposed legislation. Bounced from pillar to post by a Chancellor who says that poll tax stays and an Environment Secretary who says that it goes, the Prime Minister can almost be forgiven for appearing increasingly indecisive. He does not know what he believes in any more. Like Mr. Micawber, he simply hopes that something will turn up.

The problem for Britain is that weak, indecisive government is no way to solve the damaging consequences of the poll tax, or the recession, or any of the other problems that Britain faces today. In contrast, people want to see a programme for the 1990s which presents opportunity rather than the opportunism that is so clear in every action of the present Government, and no more clear than in the proposals before the House today.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): The hon. Gentleman should throw his notes away and make a proper speech.

Dr. Cunningham: The people will throw the right hon. Gentleman's Government away at the first opportunity.

The best way to reduce poll tax bills is to get rid of the poll tax. We should be debating this Bill, which has been cobbled together in an attempt to cover the embarrassment of Conservative Members in the Chamber today, who almost without exception voted for every dot and comma of the poll tax—every line, every sentence, every clause. Today, they are gathered to con the taxpayer, to use the taxpayer's money in an attempt to bail themselves out. What has happened to the famous saying that Governments do not have money, that it is the people's money?

Even at this late stage, we are offering to co-operate with the Government in the complete abolition of the poll tax. A Bill to abolish it could be guided through the House even more quickly, I suspect, than this one. There are plenty of Tories who, given the chance, would vote for the end of the poll tax—lock, stock and barrel. The Bill is just a one-year buy-off a kind of "live now, pay later" Bill. It does not guarantee that the poll tax will go—indeed, it guarantees that the poll tax will probably be in place at least until 1993-94. Tonight, Conservative Members will vote to keep the poll tax in place, for their constituents and for the people of Britain, for at least another two years. Let no one be in any doubt about that. Under this Bill, billions of pounds of our money are being used to bail out a discredited Government. So far as we can tell, far from removing many of the anomalies, the Bill will create a whole new class of losers—many of them people on the lowest incomes, and facing the toughest financial circumstances.

If the Bill were the subject of a two-day debate, rather than a debate lasting just a few hours, it would still be a disgraceful attempt to con the people of this country. It demonstrates beyond any doubt that the Government are devoid of principle. It certainly should not have been presented to the House in this manner, and there is no way we can accept the timetable motion.

4.48 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Although I am one of the Members who supported the introduction of the community charge legislation, I want to make it absolutely clear that I believe that both this Bill and the guillotine motion are not only necessary but desirable. The Bill strikes me as necessary because the British people have made it clear that they consider community charges to be too high. The guillotine motion is necessary because the British people have made it clear that they want action now—not next month or next year—to bring those charges down.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): For the guidance of the House and to refresh the memory of some Opposition Members, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he was a member of the Committee which considered the Local Government Finance Bill? Even by the standards of Conservative members of that Committee, he was one of those most active in sneering at and denigrating every attempt by Opposition Members to point out the error of his ways. Perhaps he should start by apologising for that.

Mr. Wilshire: I have already made it clear where I stood. I did serve on that Committee. I did believe in what I was doing. I see nothing to apologise for, because the principles that we were seeking to achieve were right. It is what has happened since that has led me to change my mind. Therefore, I do not apologise for serving on that Committee, and I am happy to make sure that the record is clear.

The Bill is desirable, because it lifts the excessive and unfair burden on local taxpayers, and the guillotine motion is desirable because it is the only way that I and the Government can see to give relief from 1 April 1991. Any other way would result in relief being given from April 1992, and that would be to ignore the message of the British people.

It is important to put the Bill and the guillotine motion in their proper context.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In the dustbin.

Mr. Wilshire: If the Labour party put the Bill and the guillotine motion in the dustbin, it would deny £140 help per head to people in six days' time. If that is the Labour party's policy, let that be made clear.

Dr. Cunningham: In the interests of greater accuracy, the hon. Gentleman had better accept, because it is true, that the Bill does not guarantee £140 off each person's bill. That is a complete fallacy, and the hon. Gentleman should not repeat it, because it will simply mislead and bitterly disappoint millions of people. As the hon. Gentleman was one of those who railroaded poll tax through the House, voted for the guillotine and said how wonderful the tax would be, does he not think that a little humility would not come amiss?

Mr. Wilshire: If I were to respond to that in the detail that it requires, Mr. Speaker, you would call me to order, because I would be making a Second Reading speech. However, I shall be delighted to respond if I catch your eye later. For the time being, let me concentrate on making sure that we put the Bill and the guillotine motion into their proper context.

What we are discussing now and what we shall be discussing for the rest of the day is not part of the fundamental review of local government. It has nothing to do with boundaries, services or local democracy; nor has it anything to do with the replacement of the community charge. The hon. Gentleman was wrong to suggest that we are now guillotining out the community charge. What we are doing is guillotining in help for people while the Government and the House take their time to work out the best way forward.

We are dealing with an interim measure, and we need to be clear about that. This is an interim measure while the Government and the country rightly take their time to work their way through the fundamental review and find the best possible replacement. But while we are taking time to get it right, the public are demanding action now and the Bill, and the guillotine motion will provide that instant action.

It is also important to understand why an interim approach at this stage is correct. As I have just said, the main review will take time, and it must be comprehensive. Even if Opposition Members, or even my hon. Friends, wanted to rush through a permanent replacement, that could not be done in six days.

The hon. Member for Copeland said that the best way to reduce the bills was to get rid of the community charge now. That just shows how little the Labour party understands about the reality of local government finance. There is no way in which we can come up with an entirely new system, even one such as the Opposition's, which has no details, in six days.

We also need to understand why the timing of the Bill and the guillotine motion could not have been different. They could not have been sooner, and they certainly could not have been later. If we had tried to discuss the matter sooner, we would have been discussing an increase in grant ahead of a Budget, and Opposition Members would correctly have asked us where we would get the money from, which would have been to pre-empt a Budget.

Anyone who knows anything about finance will know that a Budget cannot be brought forward by two or three weeks at the drop of a hat. I can imagine the noises that we would hear from Opposition Members if we brought in two Budgets—one to deal with the community charge and another a few weeks later. The blood pressure of Opposition Members would have been wondrous to behold. There was no way that it could be done sooner and there certainly is no way that it could be done later. There are six days left before the start of the new financial year.

Mr. Wilson: If those Budgets caused as much hilarity and entertainment on the Opposition Benches as the latest Budget, the Government could bring in as many Budgets as they wanted.

Mr. Wilshire: I am trying to work out whether I should laugh at that. I think that it was meant to be funny, but I cannot quite see how.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My hon. Friend will remember that this Government have brought in one Budget a year. The previous Labour Government brought in Budget after Budget after Budget so that industry and commerce did not know where they were, and nor did the ordinary people, from one week to the next.

Mr. Wilshire: That is correct. The point that my hon. Friend did not make is that that succession of Budgets was no laughing matter.

The other reason why this measure could not have been introduced later is that not only do councils need to understand where they are as quickly as possible, but the community charge payers need to be able to pay their bills as quickly as possible. Unlike some Labour Members, the overwhelming majority of the British people want to pay their bills and do not like to duck out and break the law.

We also need to understand in a little more detail why immediate action and the guillotine motion are necessary.

Mr. Tony Banks: Because the Government are panicking.

Mr. Wilshire: It is not because we are panicking. That just goes to show that Opposition Members simply do not understand. The hon. Gentleman is wrong. It is not because we are panicking; it is because the community charges are too high. They must come down now, and this is the only way to bring them down. It might help if the hon. Gentleman understood in some detail why those charges are too high. He will expect me to say that it is because of the overspending of quite a few councils, and he knows better than I which councils those are and why. But we must also be clear that community charges are too high because of the switch in funding that has taken place in recent years.

I see great evidence that the capping rules have begun to bring councils to heel. There is growing evidence that capping works and that the overspending of councils is coming under control.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not a fact that the Government have taken about £58 billion from local government since 1979? It is right that the hon. Gentleman should observe that fact and see that clearly as the reason why so much pressure has been put on local government services. It has taken him a long time to realise that, but we are grateful that at long last it has dawned on him.

Mr. Wilshire: I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have always been truthful in describing the situation. I hope that, from time to time, the hon. Gentleman will admit the shortcomings of Labour councils. Whenever I hear him talk, he simply apologises for them.

Capping has dealt with the first of those two reasons why the charges are too high. We have begun to rein in the excessive spending of councils, especially Labour councils. The point made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is fair. Resources have been switched; I am not denying that. I am saying that we must do something about it, and that is the purpose of the Bill. The guillotine motion means that we can do something about it in the next six days, rather than at some time in the future. The position reinforces the need for the guillotine.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): It would be a little more seemly if the hon. Gentleman showed an iota of humility. The fact is that a Conservative Government have perpetrated a terrible crime against the British people, and have been caught. The people's anger is rising: meanwhile, the Government are acting as though there were a war on and they were about to rush troops to some place where killing was about to start—Northern Ireland, perhaps. A Government must be desperate when they must resort to such unseemly tactics to rush through legislation. Such action is normally taken—if the word "normally" is appropriate—when a war is imminent, or already taking place.

Mr. Wilshire: That is fairly colourful language. I do not want to be drawn into the question of Northern Ireland, and I do not think that Northern Ireland Members are particularly interested in the community charge, as it does not apply to them.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of crimes against the people. I am doing my best to prevent the Labour party from perpetrating crimes against the British public by becoming the Government. That is why I do not apologise for what I have said, and why I am not prepared to accept criticisms from the Opposition.

Why do Opposition Members oppose what we are doing? Some have cited "parliamentary purity", but I do not buy that: it strikes me as a smokescreen. As it happens, I favour guillotine motions for all Bills: discussion would be much more orderly, and we would make some progress. Let me tell hon. Members who speak of parliamentary purity that Standing Orders that made it impossible for the House to take instant action when necessary would be

[Mr. Wilshire]

stupid. There is always a time and a place when such action is needed, and even this place must have means of taking it.

Opposition Members have a second reason for opposing the motion. They want to slow the pace: they want to prevent us from giving people extra help in 1991-92. I can only speculate about why. It would not help the Labour party at all if the Government——

Dr. Cunningham: Let me stop the hon. Gentleman before he puts another falsehood on the record. There is not a shred of truth in anything that he has just said. It is perfectly clear that we do not want to prevent people's poll tax bills from being reduced.

Mr. Wilshire: Then what is all the fuss about? I really must read the hon. Gentleman's speech in *Hansard*. I think that every other phrase suggested that he did not agree with what we are about today.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose——*

Mr. Rooker *rose——*

Mr. Wilshire: They are all at it now. Let us start with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).

Mr. Rooker: We are doing the job that we were elected and are paid to do—scrutinising legislation, not acting as a rubber stamp. Most of us will be satisfied if we are given the answer to one simple question. We are willing to spend the rest of the day on that, which is why we do not accept the guillotine motion. We want to know exactly how many people will not have £140 knocked off their poll tax bills. We want to know their distribution in the population, and in which regions the gainers and the losers live. Such information would be available in the normal course of parliamentary scrutiny. Given adequate time, it would be provided during a Committee stage or in a written answer.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to make a Second Reading speech. That is another reason why I should like to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker: I should love to be able to answer his question.

Only one point in the hon. Gentleman's intervention struck me as relevant to a guillotine motion debate: his point about using "the rest of the day". My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has already dealt with that. It is a simple matter. The time that is being made available is more than adequate for even the most conscientious parliamentarian to deal with the issues that are at stake. The hon. Gentleman really should sort himself out.

The reason why some hon. Members do not want people to be helped in 1991-92 is that they want to fight the local election by pointing the finger at the Government for not listening. But we are listening, and we are acting. By May this year, people will understand that they are paying lower community charges. Labour Members are trying to change the stakes in their own favour.

Mr. Battle: Conservative Members are trying to perpetuate the illusion that everyone will receive a rebate of £140. The truth is that the Bill will rub out some people's transitional relief altogether, with the result that they will pay more poll tax rather than less. When Conservative Members face up to that, perhaps we shall be able to have a proper debate on the details of the Bill. Without knowing the details, how can we discuss it?

Mr. Wilshire: Let me express for the third time my wish to be called on Second Reading, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the only way in which I can deal with such an outburst.

The third reason for Opposition Members' objection to the guillotine motion is, I suspect, that some wish to prevent the Bill from reaching the statute book.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Who?

Mr. Wilshire: I should love to give way again to hear Labour Members say that they do not object to our reducing community charge bills. Obviously they do object, if they are not prepared to confirm that. If the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) meant by his sedentary intervention that he was in favour of a reduction in bills from 1 April, he has no choice but to support the guillotine motion and the Bill. Even his half-baked solution—a return to the old rating system—simply cannot be enacted and put into operation by council treasurers in six days.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman must be bitterly regretting his failure to take my advice when I spoke from the Dispatch Box against the guillotine on Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill in 1987. As he, along with most of his hon. Friends, failed to take my advice on that crucial occasion, I despair of his ever listening to it in the future.

Mr. Wilshire: That is fair comment, but it gives me a fourth reason for wanting you to call me again, Mr. Deputy Speaker: it would provide us with more entertainment. All we are doing is stacking up reasons.

Labour Members mistakenly see the guillotine motion as a means of embarrassing the Government. It will not do that; the only people likely to be embarrassed by what Labour Members are saying are Labour Members themselves. All the bluster that they can come up with will not disguise the fact that they have no alternative solution. They do not know what they would do. As I have said, the hon. Member for Copeland could not put the rating system back in place in six days.

If I remember rightly, the hon. Member for Copeland said that a "one-year buy-off" was about to be enacted. Bringing back the rating system would be the one-year buy-off, because the Opposition say that they want to do that for a year. It is they who should be embarrassed. They are the people who are being caught out with no policies, and who are seeking to maximise mayhem among community charge payers and councils by going for a one-year fix before returning to whatever they think they may do in future. There is a great deal more that I and others would like to say, but that will be for Second Reading. If I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall make those points then.

I support the Bill, and have no difficulty in supporting the guillotine motion. The public have made it crystal clear that they want action to reduce the community charge now. We have a listening Government, who, having listened, have found a way to solve the problem within six days. Even if we have reservations—as I have made it clear in the past—about the long-term review or about any of the details, that is no reason not to support the Bill and the

guillotine motion. They are interim measures, which give us the chance to get the review into better shape before we act on it.

Swift and decisive action is needed, and the Government are being swift and decisive. The message that has emerged from the debate on the guillotine motion is that the Opposition's stupid claims about a dithering Government are untrue. I hope that the Opposition eat their words.

5.10 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The essential part of the debate happened at the beginning. It was the question put by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) to the Leader of the House about whether there was a precedent for a guillotine motion to be introduced without any effort having been made to see whether there could be consultation with the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman had to answer that there was no precedent at all. I should have thought that, even on that basis, the Government would have had second thoughts —especially when we remember that one of the reasons why the House and the country are in such an appalling mess over the poll tax is that the previous poll tax legislation was also guillotined. Had it not been guillotined, there would have been a much lengthier debate.

I remember the speeches made by my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). If the debates had continued, I do not say that we could have altered the Bill completely, but it might have been a different story. The House would at least have been given a proper chance to debate. It is staggering that a Government who have got into such hopeless confusion by rushing the previous legislation through should insist now on rushing this measure through in an even more headlong and improper fashion.

The Leader of the House had no excuse for proposing to the House what he has proposed today, especially in view of his reply to the spokesman for the Liberal party. When there is agreement between different parties, despite the fury that may accompany the background to a measure, it is a normal process for the Government to say that they want to push legislation through for special reasons—for example, the matter of the timetable, or to help local authorities. It is normal for the Government in those circumstances—when they want to push through legislation quickly—to get the co-operation of the House. They are not entitled to push it through by dictation, especially if it causes so much trouble for themselves and for the country. The Leader of the House made it clear that no effort had been made, so we must assume that the Government preferred to do it that way.

On Budget day there seemed to be some rejoicing about the Government's proposals. Some hon. Members thought that they were a good idea for everyone——

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose*——

Mr. Foot: I shall just make this point, and then I shall give way.

A report of what was said about the guillotine motion states that most hon. Members condemned it although some liked the proposals. It may have been the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who has just given us such a high constitutional view of the matter, who prompted *The Independent* to report:

"Most Conservatives, however, were delighted at what they hope will prove a short-term solution to the political death trap of the poll tax."

A Conservative Member was reported as saying:

"I don't give a damn about the propriety . . . All I'm interested in is the money."

It seems that Thatcherism is not dead—the whole gospel is there.

Mr. Wilshire: I am not sure whether I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman thought that I could have said that, but I should make it clear that it was not me.

Mr. Foot: Who are the other claimants? I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold).

Mr. Arnold: For the benefit of the House, will the right hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to 20 July 1976? As Leader of the House, he proposed not one, not two, not three, not even four but five guillotine motions. Can he tell us what the atmosphere was like in the House on that occasion?

Mr. Tony Banks: That is Labour productivity for you.

Mr. Foot: I have attended many more debates than most of the youngsters on the Tory Benches put together. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what happened on that occasion. During a debate with the previous Leader of the House about the five guillotine motions that I introduced —I say this to the present Leader of the House—I said that, if the House would like a full debate on the five issues and the problems involved, or what mandate we had from the electorate—*[Interruption.]* All were in our manifesto —*[Interruption.]* I am talking to the Leader of the House, not to the hangers-on. I said that, if the Leader of the House would like a debate on the five motions, I should be happy to agree, because it might save time and prevent interruptions by people who had not studied the issues.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I have listened to the speeches made by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) on every guillotine motion since I entered the House in 1987. He is being uncharacteristically ungenerous today. On a previous occasion, he said that the reason why he backed the five guillotine motions, although he has spoken against every such motion that the Government have introduced since they have been in power, was that he agreed with the policies. That is what he said before. Instead of torturing himself by speaking on each guillotine motion—I suppose it is out of a sense of frustration and guilt—is it not time that he stopped being guilty and retired?

Mr. Foot: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, but he did not make the best use of his opportunity.

The best way to solve the problem—and I should be happy to fall in with it—is to approach the Leader of the House and ask for a debate on all general questions. I should then do my best to allay the hon. Gentleman's fears.

Mr. Rooker: Surely there is a difference between my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) introducing guillotine motions to push through

[Mr. Rooker]

manifesto commitments and today's motion which reneges on the manifesto on which the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) entered the House in 1987.

Mr. Foot: As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) says, there is a slight difference, although I am not sure that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) could see it.

I have always advised people to look at the list of names on the back page of the Bill. The list reads as follows:

"Presented by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Michael Portillo and Mr. Robert Key."

The list does not include the Leader of the House, or the name of the person in whose interests the Bill has been introduced—the chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who has not put his name to the Bill.

The right hon. Member for Heseltine—*[Laughter.]*—well, that is what he is; he sticks to that principle more than he does to Henley, has not turned up today to help with the guillotine on his own Bill. He may have a good excuse, but I remember a previous occasion, when the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—I would rather say this to his face than behind his back, but I cannot say it to his face as he is not here—as Secretary of State for Defence, introduced a Bill to privatise Devonport dockyard. It was a scandalous Bill because Devonport dockyard had been properly nationalised and serving the country since the days of Queen Elizabeth I. The right hon. Gentleman introduced the Bill to privatise the dockyard. He was so discourteous to the House—a frequent habit, as we can see today—that he did not come here to introduce the Bill himself but sent along an underling. I do not remember the underling's name—it was Lamont, or something like that—but it was a person who had no distinction in terms of speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Defence except that, like Nelson, he had a black eye. We did not get very far on that occasion.

It would be most improper for us to proceed with the Bill without it having a proper name. We cannot get the figures right because, as the Secretary of State for the Environment has shown, the Government do not have the foggiest idea about the figures. Let us see whether we can get the name right. I have a few suggestions, such as the "Heseltine Horror". What about that? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] No, it is not very good. What about the "Major Mite"? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] No, that is not much better. Let us see whether we can get something better than that. What about the "Lamont Lemon"? I invite hon. Members later in the debate to see what they can do themselves. I am an old-fashioned kind of chap. For the sake of auld lang syne, I still like to use the phrase that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) used. She called the poll tax her "flagship", so the Bill should be called the "Flagship Tax Bill".

If hon. Members wish to complain about that, they should consider the other Members who should be here to defend the Bill. The right hon. Member for Bath, the spokesman for Conservative central office, should be here defending the Bill. Perhaps he has not yet recovered from the saturnalia at Southport. Of all the grim and grisly events of the past 10 or 15 years, the encounter at Southport must have been almost the worse.

I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has not come to the House today as he should have done. I am so old that I can hardly tell the difference between the Pattens, the Patties, the Patsies and the others. I cannot imagine how you tell the difference between them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At least one of them should have had his name on the Bill. Until one of those right hon. Members puts his name to the Bill, and until we have an explanation from them, I shall consider the Bill to be an even bigger fraud than it appears on the face of it.

Yesterday, we had a most interesting contribution to the discussion from the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). I am reminded of one of the most extraordinary aspects of the whole affair—if I malign any hon. Member, I am sure that he will jump to his feet and put me right—when I look at the Government Front Bench and a little further afield and see those who were sacked at various intervals. I challenged the right hon. Member for Blaby on the matter. My comments may be a great deal more popular with the Government today than they were yesterday, as the Government are not entirely pleased with the right hon. Gentleman.

Despite all the commotion about the tax, about its horrors, iniquities and injustices, and about the injury that it will do the Government, not one Conservative Member has plucked up courage to resign over the issue of the poll tax. When I put the argument to him yesterday, the right hon. Member for Blaby said that I could not accuse him of not resigning. However, he did not resign over the poll tax, but over the intrusion of Professor Walters into his own private or public life—whichever it was—which he thought was a more important question than the principle of the poll tax. Not one Conservative Member, on the Front or Back Benches, can say that he put principle before personal interest on the great question of the poll tax. They were all afraid of the previous Prime Minister and bowed to her. It is because of that long, craven performance that the House and the country face this terrible problem.

If the right hon. Member for Blaby bothered to turn up occasionally when he is not making a speech in the House, he might bounce to his feet now and say, "Those of us at the Treasury were working against the tax." I suppose that the right hon. Gentleman would try to give some reflected glory to the present Prime Minister on that basis. The Treasury was supposed to be against the tax and was supposed to be working all the time to try to do something about it. As I said previously, some Conservatives claim to have been doing good by stealth. The rest is on record, and that record will destroy the Government.

5.27 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I should think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are probably as puzzled as I am after the previous speech. Who would have thought that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was the progenitor of the mother of all guillotines? He had support from his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) who, in his usual sotto voce way, said that the great benefit of what the right hon. Gentleman had done all those years ago was productivity, that the Labour party does not believe in one guillotine at a time, but in five or even more at a time. We know where they stand.

I do not like the Opposition. I am sure that that feeling is reciprocated. There is nothing personal about it. They are a splendid group of men and women to a person. I just do not like their political style. Let me explain. I remember recently, after one of those many boring, boorish television occasions, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), in his usual political style of Laurence Olivier playing Richard III, busily manufacturing statistics, mauling facts and finding, as only he can, the worst in everything. One of my constituents said to me, "Don't worry, Mr. M. he is only a cross-eyed moaner." The trouble is that all of them on the Opposition Benches are cross-eyed moaners. They know that the Bill is necessary, but they are moaning about it. Everyone knows that the rates were wrong, that they were grossly unfair and had to go—or should I say, everybody knew?

The Opposition believed that, by waving a wand and stitching in the word "fair" before "rates", they would miraculously become fair. Lewis Carroll would have been proud of them. The Opposition cannot cope with the fact that no Government before this one have had the guts and tenacity to deal with the problems of local government finance. The Bill is part of that vital and important process.

The community charge was, in many respects, a good answer to the problem. Those who voted for extravagance paid extravagantly. Everyone had to pay something. There was a small problem, but with the successful launch of the community charge, that problem would have been overcome easily. We all accept that the community charge is bureaucratic, but with a successful launch, its benefits would have outweighed the disadvantages. The key was a successful launch, but that did not happen, and that is why we are where we are now.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was a remarkable person—*[Interruption.]*—is a remarkable person. She was the finest peacetime Prime Minister of this century. Without her premiership, this country would have been heading for the political knacker's yard.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Marlow: I shall not give way; I am short of time because others have gone on for a long time. The hon. Gentleman has had his go, but I am sure that he will have plenty of time to have another go later, when I shall not stand in his way. On this occasion, however, if he will forgive me, I shall not give way.

Human nature took its toll, however, as it does so often. Power has its effect, even on the greatest, and the early and necessary success of my right hon. Friend's will power made her too certain and too remote. She began to lack that political beer that refreshes the parts that other beers do not reach. Her political instincts and responsiveness atrophied. It was my right hon. Friend's determination to launch the community charge, warts and all, at a time of economic difficulty that meant that it was floated at too high a level. That launch secured the sinking of the flagship, if not my right hon. Friend's downfall.

In the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the public consequently "has not been persuaded that the tax is fair". Had the community charge been launched at a lower level, it would still be firing on all guns, but it was not to be. It had to go, to die, to be replaced. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) keeps talking about "son of poll tax", but he should realise that his fox has been shot and that the poll tax is going.

That brings me back to the Opposition—where do they stand? Apparently we dither, but we took a massive and courageous decision to reform the finances and structure of local government. We dithered when we took a clear and unambiguous decision to replace a major policy. According to the Opposition, we have dithered because, for a few weeks, we want to consult and to hear the views of others to strengthen the support for, and consequently make successful, a radical and overdue reform of a vital sector of government.

After 11 years in opposition, most parties devise a half-credible, half-worked-out and half-decent plan for local government, but not this Opposition. It is they who are the ditherers.

Where do the Opposition stand today? The Bill seeks to reduce the headline figure for community charge by £140. Are they for or against that? Those who are for it complain that it should have been done in a different way. How? Would they have pre-empted the Budget?

Mr. Battle: No.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Yes.

Mr. Marlow: One would, one would not. Between them there is a political line that is either naive or dishonest. Either the Labour party has been so long in opposition that it is unfit to govern or its political line is so deceitful that it should never be allowed to govern.

The Opposition criticise our new proposals, but what are they against?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marlow: I shall not give way, as I am about to finish.

Are the Opposition against the fact that the change relates to property valuation, or are they against the fact that the change relates to the number of people in each household? In the immortal phrase, "I believe we ought to know." The Labour party is a party of little minds with little policies and negative attitudes, a party the summit of whose ambitions is not to improve, but to delay and frustrate.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman is signalling that that is precisely what he wants to do. I shall not give way.

I believe that today's schedule of debate provides more than enough time for the teaspoonful of positive thought that the Opposition are likely to bring to the debate—certainly more than they deserve. I therefore support the motion.

5.35 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move amendment *(a)* to the motion, in paragraph (8) (2), at end insert—

'(e) the Question on any new Clauses, new Schedules or amendments which shall have been selected for debate by Mr. Speaker or by the Chairman of the Committee;'.

As I listened to the remarks of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and those of the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) I began to wonder

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

about the criterion for those selected, or nominated, for the job of speaking for the Government in favour of the motion. Clearly, that criterion did not cover those who want to address themselves precisely to the parliamentary consequences of tabling a motion in this form in circumstances such as this.

Those who may have spoken in those terms—for example the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee—made themselves scarce as soon as they saw the direction in which the debate was going. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made a pointed, sensible intervention earlier, and he has stuck the debate out, possibly with some embarrassment. He may yet help to carry the argument further by intervening again, or in some other way, because the motion before us is without precedent.

There is no previous occasion on which any Government of any party have sought to railroad a Bill through all its stages in the House in one day with the aid of a timetable motion. That has simply never been attempted, as nobody has dared to do it or suggest it. The occasions on which Bills have gone through all their stages in the House on one day make an interesting comparison with today's occasion: for example, the abdication crisis, which is a strange parallel to the poll tax reversal of today; the Northern Ireland crisis or an impending general election—the last thing we may contemplate today, given the state of things.

The Government did not need to get into this mess. They are in a hole and they have made a fatal mistake of carrying on digging, which one is always told not to do in such circumstances. The Government have consulted and have taken advice. We gave them some advice, and if they had taken it they would not have to do what they are doing today. The Government could have introduced a local income tax some time ago.

Even if we accept for the purposes of today's debate that the Government had a difficulty and that they wanted to take some action for the coming year to relieve the undoubtedly arduous burdens of the poll tax, it would have been possible to do so without post offices being piled high with bills and sacks of mail. It was not beyond the wisdom of the Government to advise local authorities that, because the review was continuing, it would be prudent not to send out the bills until the Secretary of State had made his announcement on Thursday. That would have covered the unexpected announcement on Tuesday in the Budget—the element of surprise.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman has spoken of piles of community charge bills, and that obviously worries anyone who is keen to cut out waste. If the hon. Gentleman intends to oppose the motion, however, he will ensure that that uncertainty continues. That will mean that more authorities will have even more mounds of bills and will lead to uncertainty for the community charge payer. Now that we have made the decision on the community charge, surely it is right simply to get on with it.

Mr. Beith: I am in favour of that, but my argument is that the motion is unnecessary and dangerous in its consequences. Conservative Members should consider some of the consequences of passing a motion of this kind, whatever the merits may appear to be at the time. Bad precedents are usually set by people who think that they are doing everyone good. I am sure that that view is held by Ministers and most Conservative Members, leaving aside those who are incapable of distinguishing between the politics of the issue and the substance of parliamentary procedure.

Some Conservative Members might have a thought to the parliamentary procedure, but believe that they are doing so much good that it does not matter what holes they make in the parliamentary system or what coach and horses they drive through parliamentary procedure. I hope to make them think a little before I conclude my remarks.

Having got into this mess, there is no need for the Government to destroy substantial parts of parliamentary democracy as well. Poll tax mistakes have already cost billions of pounds in transfers of money and millions of pounds in totally unnecessary expenditure of the kind that I referred to; why should they cost us significant elements of parliamentary democracy too? We are all paying a high price for other people's mistakes—mistakes for which no heads have yet rolled.

This allocation of time motion is a device to get the Government off the hook, but it is tomorrow's precedent for silencing parliamentary democracy. The Leader of the House has gone to another meeting, which may be important but is not as important as this debate. He presented a pretty weak case when trying to justify this motion. In answer to my question, he conceded that he had not made the slightest attempt to secure agreement from other parties, or even to establish whether there was any basis for such agreement.

I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's evidence for the belief that many hon. Members will vote against the Bill and will seek to prevent it from being enacted. Whatever arguments I might wish to adduce about the greater suitability and wisdom of proceeding by way of a local income tax, I have not yet met many hon. Members who are prepared to vote in the Lobby in such a way as to deny the £140 relief to those of their constituents who will get it, or to deny the lesser relief to constituents who will get that. There seems to be a general disposition to recognise that, although the mess that the Government have made is great, relief is desperately needed.

The Leader of the House has advanced no evidence that he would have difficulty getting the Bill through the Lobbies of the House, and there is not much evidence that he would even have much difficulty getting it through debate in the House. When he talks about the urgency of the matter from the point of view of local government, I must point out that Opposition parties are as fully represented in local government as the Conservative party. We are in constant contact with treasurers, local government officers and councillors in our constituencies. We know about the difficulties that they face—indeed, we have been trying to point them out throughout the period in which the Government have added to them. We are well aware that, if legislation were not enacted this week, it would add to those already serious difficulties. Therefore, there was a clear basis for getting a Bill through this week.

Some hon. Members would advance the argument that timetables from the beginning of a Bill have positive merits and that the procedures of the House would be better if we timetabled everything from the start. That case was advanced by the Select Committee on Procedure when I was a member—the Chairman of that Committee was present during the early part of this debate.

However, that notion was opposed by the Government and also by the Opposition Front Bench because it contained safeguards to ensure that timetabling from the beginning did not deny the right of reasonable debate on issues within a Bill to substantial groups, whether in other parties or Conservative Back-Bench Members. Therefore, it is no use the Government advancing the argument that timetabling could be a better way to do business in the House as they denied a properly safeguarded system of timetabling to the House.

The Government have tabled a motion that does not provide for adequate discussion to develop on specific amendments and for votes on individual amendments. A fair block of time will be available to us, but there is no guarantee that that time will be reasonably allocated between various subjects.

I said that there was a fair block of time, but let me qualify that. There is an amount of time—several hours—in which we can debate the Bill. However, Ministers of all people ought to know that, when one gets down to the details of the Bill, it suddenly becomes apparent that some parts need more attention than others, because mistakes are inherent in the way that it is drafted or problems may arise from it. There is no way that we shall be able to cope with those within the procedure offered to us tonight.

Interest in early amendments may well ensure that many later amendments are never considered and certainly never voted on. That is the reason for my amendment, which seeks to ensure that, in those cases where Mr. Speaker has decided that an amendment ought to be selected for debate, we can at least vote on it. The procedures of this motion ensure that the Government decide the substance of the Bill and what amendments are to be voted on because, when time runs out, the Government will choose which matters will be voted on.

That is also true of Lords amendments. We will have one hour to debate all the amendments that may be sent from another place. In the face of these procedures, their Lordships will be wise to study the Bill very carefully indeed. They may well discover errors and send back amendments. However, the Government are free to decide that an important Lords amendment will only be voted on en bloc with a series of amendments, and thus it could simply be thrown out without debate as part of a group. Frankly, if that happens, their Lordships will be fully justified in insisting on their amendments and keeping that protest going until the House takes part in a proper parliamentary procedure, which this motion precludes in the circumstances that I have described.

The amendments that we will attempt to discuss later may reveal all sorts of errors and problems in the Bill. That is what happened in the case of the poll tax. Hon. Members will remember that Conservative Members focused attention upon some of the serious problems that arose because of the lack of banding or relationship to ability to pay. Those issues were not taken seriously enough, and eventually became the subject of a guillotined debate. Even though this Bill is much shorter, it would be very surprising if some matters did not need to be discussed.

Any discussions on amendments will cover various matters, including controversial issues that hon. Members are fully entitled to mention in the context of the Bill—for example, the 20 per cent. issue. It is the belief of many Opposition Members that it is ludicrous to continue to expect people to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax when they have no income from which to pay it and would not pay it on grounds of income. The Audit Commission knows that it is ludicrous, because it costs more to collect than one gets back.

That is a reasonable subject to discuss. I do not believe that we would persuade the Government about that matter, so I would not propose that we spent the entire night discussing it but it is not unreasonable that we should deal with that issue to some extent in the context of this Bill.

Another issue is the poll tax in Scotland, where it has been levied for a year longer than in England and Wales. Scotland will not get a rebate backdated to the time when the tax started there. That is another controversial issue, on which, again, I am sure that the Government will give no ground on it, but it is reasonable to mention it in discussions on the Bill.

After we have considered that type of issue, we will come to important technical matters which are less controversial but are nevertheless important—for example, the question of what local authorities will do when it will clearly cost them more to collect the reduced poll tax than they will get from collecting it. That is a reasonable problem which has arisen as a direct consequence of the Bill. Amendments have been tabled to deal with that problem but we may never reach them. Therefore, we shall never be able to sort out the problem that local authority treasurers and councillors will face should they waste charge payers' money by spending more on collecting the charge than they receive by collecting it.

Last night, in the debate on the money resolution, a Minister who once thought that the poll tax was the greatest thing since sliced bread—and has not since resigned—made a few general observations. However, they were not helpful to local authorities, which want the Bill to be properly worded.

Another example of a technical matter of some importance that we need to consider later is the position as regards standard community charges. Are they or are they not reduced by £140? If they are reduced—I see that Ministers are nodding to say so—by £140, will local authorities be reimbursed for the disproportionately greater loss to their budget that some of them will face because of that substantial reduction in standard charges? I have consulted my local authority on that matter. That type of issue has been mentioned to us and should be explored through amendments to the Bill.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because, as I think he knows, two of my constituents happen to have a second home in his constituency. They have written to me, and have told me that they have written to the hon. Gentleman. Will he not concede that the real villain of the piece is his district council, which misused the discretion granted and charged my constituents a double community charge for their second home? That was never intended.

Mr. Beith: Far from being "never intended", that was specifically envisaged by the Government who included provisions that would allow exactly that to happen, and local authorities all over the country did exactly that. Many of those local authorities had a predominance of Conservative members. If the hon. Gentleman or the Minister—or the Bill—is to tell all those local authorities, Conservative and others, that there will be substantially

[Mr. Beith]

less income from the standard charge, that is obviously a factor that the local authorities will have to consider, but it is too late now for them to readjust their budgets if there are to be substantial changes as a result of the Bill. I simply instance that as an example of the technical problems that local authorities will want to discuss later. Some problems may emerge in the debates in another place and return to us but, again, we shall have inadequate time to debate them.

As well as the major controversial issues, on which we shall not gain any ground from the Government, Ministers must know from their own experience of legislation that some issues may arise on which they will even feel disposed to make changes. They may even feel disposed to admit that the drafting is not satisfactory, but we do not have an adequate way of dealing with those problems.

We know what the answer will be tonight. It will be, "We haven't time to change anything." However, during the next few days, the Government could certainly find the time to get the Bill into some proper order. There is no point in introducing and carrying through bad legislation.

The result of all this is a bad day for Parliament. If this was the new procedure for parliamentary debate in Poland or Czechoslovakia, the Government would be talking about withdrawing aid from those countries because they were not setting out on proper democratic processes. This is a dangerous precedent. If this is okay—if it is all right to rush this Bill through on a timetable motion, denying any opportunity of challenge and debate simply because the Government face a difficulty of their own making—why should not the Government——

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech, but some of us can distinctly smell burning. We hope that it is the poll tax going up in flames, but perhaps the matter could be investigated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I shall have inquiries made.

Mr. Beith: I have always had the ambition metaphorically to set the House on fire.

If it is in order and if it is acceptable for the Government to solve a problem of their own making by this draconian extension of parliamentary practice, why should not the Government privatise British Coal in one day? Why should not a Labour Government renationalise British Telecom in one day? Why should we not set up a Scottish Parliament in one day on a guillotine motion? Why should we not introduce electoral reform in one day on a timetable or guillotine motion?

All of us would think that we would be doing no end of good by such measures—a good that would justify the abrogation of parliamentary procedure that is involved. There do not seem to be many hon. Members left who are prepared to speak up for the procedure itself and for the need for some kind of guarantee against a Government riding roughshod over the rights of hon. Members to represent their constituents.

If parliamentary democracy were not so fragile in this country, if we had a representative electoral system, we would never have had the poll tax in the first place, and none of this would be happening.

5.53 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has made an unusual speech in this debate, because he actually talked about the guillotine motion. The only other hon. Member to talk seriously—or perhaps I should say at length—about the guillotine motion was the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), to whom the House listened with great respect and enjoyment, first because of the magnificence of his speech—they are always magnificent—and secondly because no hon. Member knows more about guillotine motions than the right hon. Gentleman.

I remember being in opposition and sitting only a few feet from where the right hon. Gentleman is sitting and listening to him move five guillotine motions in one day. That was not the only occasion on which he moved a guillotine motion. At that time, exactly the same thoughts were in the minds of the then Opposition Members—members of the Conservative and Liberal parties—as have been advanced today by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Mr. Foot *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Latham: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but we also thought that our procedures were being abused by having five guillotine motions in one day. The argument that he advanced at that time was that the Government had a mandate for it, that they were going to get their will, and that the House of Commons must respond to the procedures adopted by the Government. That argument is frequently used by Leaders of the House, because whenever there is a debate on a guillotine motion, those on the majority side of the House say, "We do not need to debate this at all. We could scrap all the debate and

The interesting thing about the speech of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed is that he produced real arguments for debating the guillotine motion. He said that the time allocated was not long enough, that the motion was unreasonable and improper and that the issues could not properly be discussed in the time allocated. He also said that, if my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House had had proper consultations, there could perhaps have been an agreed measure.

The hon. Gentleman is an experienced parliamentarian, and I do not think that he can seriously suggest that it would have been possible for this Government to introduce this legislation in this form as an agreed measure, when he knows perfectly well that his party is in favour of a local income tax and that the Labour party is, in effect, in favour of returning to the rating system. Therefore, it would not be possible to have an agreed measure that could command the support also of the majority of my hon. Friends. The Government are clearly, therefore, in a difficult position.

I do not defer to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed in my admiration for the procedures of this House of which, in the past, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent was a great custodian. I remember listening to the right hon. Gentleman day after day when he was Leader of the House, when he behaved very strongly, but nobody could doubt his devotion to the House for a moment. If any of us really thought that the House would be gravely damaged by the procedures that we are debating, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed implied, I do not

believe that many of us would be prepared to support the motion. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is clearly worried about this matter, and his concerns are to be respected because he is independent-minded and clear-thinking; I pay tribute to him for that.

I am prepared to vote for the motion for one reason and one reason only—because circumstances require it. Those circumstances are that my constituents need a reduction in the poll tax, and they need it now. I am absolutely delighted that, following the excellent Budget last Tuesday, my right hon. and hon. Friends have introduced a Bill that will reduce the poll tax for many of my constituents.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman says that his constituents need that reduction now. Do they also "need" the increase of 2·5 per cent. in value added tax?

Mr. Latham: The Government are absolutely right to pay for this concession by increasing other taxes. I have publicly argued for that on many occasions——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Do they need it equally?

Mr. Latham: Obviously, they are not likely to like it, but they will accept that it is right that public expenditure should be paid for rather than coming from further borrowing.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend's comment that his constituents want the reduction now goes to the nub of this debate and of the one that we shall be having for the rest of the night. Does he agree that the Labour party has been trying to say that it does not disapprove of the £4 billion shift, but that it would prefer it to have gone, not to his and my constituents, but to the local authorities? Does my hon. Friend further agree, that if that sum had gone to the local authorities, they would merely have spent it and our constituents would have received exactly the same bills?

Mr. Latham: I am sure that my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Returning to the guillotine motion, it is significant that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) began by saying, once or twice, that the motion and the debate were a disgrace; he then talked about the Bill; said again that the whole thing was a disgrace, and then sat down. He devoted his whole speech to the Bill. What really worries the Opposition is that the Government are cutting poll tax bills now.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does not my hon. Friend agree that our hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) has got it in one? Let us take the example of the people in the London borough of Merton. They have a newly elected Labour council which has increased the demand by £136, which means that the council will have spent almost all the £140. That is an example of exactly what Labour councils do with more money.

Mr. Latham: My hon. Friend is right; that is well understood by many people and it is one reason why the Labour party's results in Wandsworth, Westminster and Ealing were so poor in the local government elections. It is also perhaps the reason why the Conservative party won the county council by-election in Leicester city last Thursday. I have no doubt that it will go on to do very well in the local elections in Leicester city on 2 May.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House did not put forward the motion in a spirit of enthusiasm. Of course it would have been better if we had had more time to discuss the matter. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed is right to say that more time would have been desirable. However, the Government having decided, in my view absolutely rightly, in the Budget to cut the poll tax for our constituents, it is proper for the House to respond and get on with the legislation so that the poll tax can be reduced. That is what we are doing today. I believe that our procedures are here to serve the House and our constituents, not the other way round.

6 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), in a thoughtful speech, referred to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have served in local government. As one such person, I should like to make the point that, if we had seen in local government the brashness, arrogance and disregard for procedure that are represented in the motion, the party responsible—whatever its complexion—would have been rejected by the electorate at the following election. No doubt that will be the case when people get the opportunity to vote nationally.

We are being asked to give the Government time—a precious commodity in the House—to deal with a measure when it is clear that not even the Government are aware what the measure is likely to mean. We are entitled to look at the road map before we decide on the route.

Because the Government believe in government in dribs and drabs, by leak, we are entitled to ask why they have got themselves into difficulties and whether more parliamentary time will decrease the difficulties or add to them. On the Government's record, the evidence is that, if we give them more scope, the difficulties will become even larger.

We heard a major leak yesterday in the shape of the speech from the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). I do not know about his expertise in financial matters, but when he came to local government and steadfastly refused to give way, he exposed an appalling ignorance of the subject. It worried me that he, with other right hon. Members, should have had such influence on local government in the past decade. Because of the thinking of the right hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues, we face the current difficulties.

It is not enough for Conservative Members to say that we are just talking about a reduction of £140 for each poll tax payer. It is much more complicated. If we decide to allow the Government to go ahead in the pragmatic way that they are attempting to do, and have done for so long, we will ignore the picture that is staring us in the face and which the former Chancellor did not seem to recognise. He took credit for an increase of £2·6 billion in the funding of local government expenditure in 1990, but he ignored information available in the Library which shows that since 1978-79, at 1990-91 prices, the central Government contribution to local government has decreased by over £57 billion.

No structure can take such abuse and underfunding without there being local difficulties. It is not enough for

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

Conservative Members to blame, as they have done for the last couple of years, Labour councils for increases in expenditure. I have never heard such slagging of councils and councillors as there has been in the last couple of years. Surely Conservative Members should have the modesty to admit that their approach to the matter and the poll tax might have had something to do with it.

Yesterday, the former Chancellor argued for even more centralisation and more reductions in the amount of total funding received by local authorities; he seemed to argue that the Treasury should have a bigger say in local government finance. Many of us are worried about it, and our worries increased today because of the question asked by the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell). We concede that his judgment has not been totally awry, but he tried to persuade the Prime Minister that instead of increasing VAT by 2·5 per cent. he should make it 5 per cent. Therein lies the difficulty—do we believe in local government, or do we not?

When we hear the arguments of the former Chancellor and some of his colleagues, are we not entitled to remind them of the Irish experiment? In 1977, Jack Lynch swept to power in the Republic of Ireland when he said he would abolish local rates. He did it, but most people in the Republic would agree that it has not recovered to this day. We remember the huge protests about increases in income tax, the farmers marching along O'Connell street, and local communities pleading with central Government to remember their needs in roads, social services and education.

It seems that some Government advisers here are determined to take education out of the local government structure. If that happens, it will be to our cost and even more to the cost of our children.

We are told that under the new Prime Minister we have a listening Government. I hope that proves to be the case, but they have not made a good start by asking for a guillotine or, despite their pledges about consultation, by telling us firmly that the new proposals will still be based on the principle of the poll tax, with a clumsy property tax. The Minister of State, Scottish Office—the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—has not graced us with his presence in the debate, nor has the Secretary of State for Scotland. How they can go along with the proposal after the campaign that they conducted I cannot understand.

Instead of being asked to adopt a simple guillotine for a few hours so that the Government can tidy up some unfinished business, we are faced with something much more significant——

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman referred to the absence of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). In fairness, I was watching that hon. Member closely during Prime Minister's questions and I have never seen an hon. Member look more ill than he did in that quarter of an hour.

Mr. Clarke: I am not an expert on medical matters and wish the hon. Member for Stirling no ill—his political deficiencies will be sufficient for us to remove him when the opportunity comes.

What we are debating tonight is much more significant than many Conservative Members have said, with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), as one would have expected. We also hear about changes in the structure of local government, including that in Scotland. Surely, if there is to be a change in structure, we in Scotland are entitled —again, it is disgraceful that no Scottish Office Minister is here—to have a commission such as that which has been offered to England and Wales. We hear so much about consultation but such a commission is being denied the people of Scotland because our Secretary of State says that there is a consensus on these matters in Scotland.

The consensus is much wider than the Secretary of State thinks. There is, indeed, a consensus in Scotland that we should get rid of the poll tax, that we should provide reasonable local services and that the community should have a say in its area but there is a consensus about another matter, which the Secretary of State for Scotland has resisted. The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) referred to it yesterday. I accept that most people want a new structure of local government in Scotland. There is an overwhelming demand for a Scottish Parliament to draw up the structure within the United Kingdom.

I do not see why the Secretary of State should say that there is a consensus for one tier of local government but ignore the consensus for a Scottish Parliament. He should bear that in mind. The right hon. Member for Blaby said yesterday that when the case for a Scottish Parliament was last debated in Scotland, it fell at the first post because the assembly that was suggested—my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) will have fond memories of the debates—did not have tax-raising powers. That was one of the reasons why in the referendum we did not obtain the 40 per cent. vote which the House demanded. Furthermore, the former Prime Minister, Lord Home, intervened during the referendum to say that a Conservative Government would make those tax-raising powers available in any case.

I believe that local government should be seen as local government. It should have the power to raise finance and it should have a reasonable relationship with central Government. Local government has been damaged in recent years. We have not so much drifted as raced towards centralisation under this Government. We have seen the introduction of competitive tendering and the abolition of the Greater London council. The presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) in the House day after day is a reminder that the abolition of the GLC was not welcome to local government or the people of London. Far too often, as part of the aggro against local government, we have seen the intervention of the laws, as though people were not entitled to make their own decisions in a local setting. On the whole, that has not been helpful.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on a great dilemma. What proportion of local government expenditure should come from central Government? He mentioned that if the same arrangements applied as in 1979 local government would be £57,000 million better off. What proportion of that would he like to see go to local government? How does he suggest that it should be raised?

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted to be asked that question. There was a time when local and central Government met and agreed on these matters. If that had been the case in

recent times, we in Scotland would not have lost 12 per cent. of global rate support grant as we have done over the past 10 years. I suggest that, despite the Tory ideology on these matters, there is a case for returning to a partnership between this House and local government. It is a matter of great regret that the partnership has been lost. Instead, we have seen scepticism and mistrust. That approach is unhelpful. For that reason, I hope that the House will reject the motion before us tonight and move towards strengthening local government. In so doing, we shall also strengthen British democracy.

6.14 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I return to the point that I was making to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). He said that local government received £57,000 million less than it did in 1979. It is unreasonable of the Opposition not to apply themselves to the problem of where that £57,000 million should come from. I calculate that £57,000 million is roughly equivalent to 35p in the pound in income tax. Do the Opposition suggest that income tax should increase at the rate of 35p?

Mr. Rooker: The figure that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) gave was cumulative over 12 years, so let us not have that hare running.

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman did not know the facts.

Mr. Favell: I asked a perfectly reasonable question and attempted to deal with the matter. I accept the answer that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) gave. The hon. Member for Monklands, West did not say that the figure was per annum or in total. This is a debate, and it is important that we debate these matters sensibly.

There is a dilemma about what percentage of local government expenditure should come from central Government. It is not unreasonable for me to expect the Opposition to label how much they want. As the hon. member for Monklands, West said, the amount has been reduced. I asked the question—I see the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) nodding in agreement. It was my parliamentary question that identified that the average community charge now would be £152 per annum if the Government could return to the arrangements which applied in 1979. It was my question, and I have done the House a favour by asking it. I have certainly done the community charge payer a favour because the solution that the Government have proposed—a £140 reduction for each charge payer—is sensible. I am sure that in their heart of hearts Opposition Members, regardless of party, agree with just that.

Mr. Maxton: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if the Government had been prepared to increase central Government grant to Scotland in 1985, when the Government got into the blind panic about revaluation in Scotland which produced the crazy poll tax scheme, we would not be in this position now. We would never have abolished the rates, and the Government would not be in the blind panic crisis that they are in.

Mr. Favell: That may be, It may also be that, if we had maintained the level of government grant, we would not be seeking to repeal the community charge. I fear that that is one thing about which the Opposition are worried. Once the community charge has been reduced, the people of Britain may find it is no bad thing. On the doorsteps, people have made it perfectly clear that they are worried about the level of the community charge. They say, "Mr. Favell, we have no objection to everyone contributing to the cost of local government services. We object to the level." I am not surprised. From day one, I have been worried about the level. It has affected certain members of the community badly, especially, pensioners with a small occupational pension from the gas board, British Rail or whatever, of perhaps £30 or £40 a month. I have a great deal of sympathy with such people.

I for one am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer grasped the nettle and proposed the reduction of £140. Clearly, he had the support of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I applaud what has been done. To suggest that there has been dithering over this issue by the Government is a complete travesty of the truth. It is one of the most decisive decisions to be made for a long time.

The Government went to the heart of the problem, and the answer is being implemented rapidly. For that reason, I support the motion. To delay matters now would mean local authorities not knowing the sort of bills to distribute, and that would go on while we argued the toss for weeks and perhaps months. It would be equally unrealistic to expect the community charge payer to wait, because he too must budget, just as town hall staffs do.

The Opposition parties are simply indulging in sound and fury. The fear that the Government have made a decision that should have been made a long time ago and reduce the level of the community charge. I should not be opposed to retaining the present system. There will be time for all concerned to discuss the issues involved, but at the outset we have attended to the root of the problem. That has resulted in our removing the unnecessarily, and I believe unsupportably, high bills that some members of society have received.

6.21 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Credit is due to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for making an excellent speech, although I take issue with him on one point. I do not object too strongly to the parliamentary chaos that accompanies this legislation. I would rather have the chaos confronting the demise of the poll tax than the chaos resulting from its continuation.

Nor do I resent the panic on the Government Benches that was evident earlier during Prime Minister's Question Time. Any group of people who were determined to impose a poll tax on the people deserve any panic that comes their way. I caution the Government, however. Even a group of people in headlong retreat should pause and allow time to consider whether they are running away in the right direction.

It is clear, particularly from last night's money resolution, that the full implications of the £140 reduction have not been thought through by the Government. Indeed, we now know from the Minister's announcement last night that only at a very late stage did the Government

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suddenly realise that taking £140 off the headline poll tax bill would not help many people already affected by the community charge reduction scheme.

It was clear from last night's announcement that the developing concern, to put it no more strongly, of people who are already feeling cheated—having been told that they will get £140 the Government were suddenly confronted with the argument that many people would get nothing—has provoked the Government into making more changes in the reduction scheme.

I appeal for more time to consider people in receipt of poll tax rebate who, under the new legislation, will not benefit from anything like the £140. If they are on the full 80 per cent. rebate, the reduction in their final poll tax bills will be very small. Compared with the enormous cost of the Budget measure that we are considering, the cost of exempting those in the 20 per cent. category—people on the lowest incomes, the poor, sick, unemployed and students—from the poll tax would be tiny.

I argue—not just in terms of principle and the general interest, because such an argument would not make much impression on the Tory party, but even on the basis of Tory self-interest—that the Government should allow time for us to consider properly the amendments that stand on the Order Paper, especially those that would allow a reduction of £140 in final poll tax bills, as opposed to headline bills, which would properly help not just those in the 20 per cent. category but a good proportion of the

The panic in which the Tories find themselves was confirmed by the Prime Minister a week past Monday when he said with reasonable candour to his Back Benchers that the poll tax had become "uncollectable". Less quoted, and perhaps even more direct, were some remarks made on BBC television about two weeks ago by the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox), the vice-chairman of the 1922 Committee, who presumably has his ear close to the ground and knows what Tory Members are thinking. He said:

"We have to listen to the people. So many of them are not paying it."

That has led to this legislation, to the chaos in parliamentary procedure and to the panic in the Tory ranks. Clearly, the poll tax has been tested to destruction.

6.25 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): At the heart of the whole issue which faces us is a question of timing. We are talking about the largest transfer of taxation—£4·25 billion—for 10 years. The transfer could not have been made earlier. We could not have announced such an increase in spending without announcing how the money would be found. Without doing that, there would have been a run on the pound and the markets would have thought that it was a case of unsound finance by the Government.

National taxation must be announced simultaneously with the Budget, and the Budget must be as close as possible to the start of the financial year to which it refers. So, once the announcement was made in the Budget, speed was of the essence to put the mechanics in place, and that is what the timetable motion is about. It is technically essential to the process with which we are concerned.

Urgency also arises in the need to respond to public opinion, which wants us to take the £140 off quickly, but we must also respond urgently to the requirements of administrators and financial controllers in individual councils, including Labour-controlled authorities.

Public opinion on the community charge is primarily an objection to the weight of the tax. Time and again we hear that all are agreed that every adult in the community should pay a share towards local government, but there is no agreement about the weight of the charge. An analogy would be a bridge with a capacity for four-tonne vehicles. One does not drive a 10-tonner across, because the bridge would break. That has happened to the community charge.

I welcome the increase of £4·25 billion in revenue support grants because they create a reduction of £140 in the bills that people would otherwise have received. The reduction is popular with the public.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman says that the weight of the matter is the size of the bill. What does he consider to be the consideration in the minds of people who live in areas where, last year, the community charge was £240 to £260 or, as in my area, £280? Why, if their figures are not weighted, are they also vigorously opposed to the poll tax?

Mr. Arnold: Because what they were led to expect was much less than the outturn figures. We could all make comparisons, as I could for Gravesham.

Why are Labour Members so opposed to this measure and to the community charge? After all, they have not been well known for opposing taxation. Indeed, the Labour party is known as the party of high taxation, and the new programme that Labour Members have been announcing, along with the promises that go with it, proves that they belong to the party of high spending and, consequently, of high taxing.

Mr. Rooker: I hate to repeat the argument, but the hon. Gentleman has never heard a Labour Member say that the Labour party's central objection to the poll tax is based on anything other than the fact that it was a flat rate tax unrelated to the ability to pay. That was repeated ad nauseam during 1987 and 1988 and was the subject of a special one-day debate in the House on the basis of the so-called Mates amendments. Our central objection to the poll tax was that it was the same rate for everyone in a local authority area. The hon. Gentleman has clearly not taken that point on board.

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the community charge is related to inability to pay because it included an enhanced rebate system, which was far more generous than the rate rebate system and coped with problems arising from the inability to pay.

The Labour party is opposed to the community charge because it enables the general public to compare councils' performances. It did away with charging so many pence in the pound on a notional 1972 rental product of a property. People could understand the community charge on the basis of so much a head for one council and so much for another. They began to compare councils and asked why some people paid £250 while those down the road in another borough paid £450. The community charge had become a comparative measure.

Mr. Beith: Should not we debate on such an occasion —it is the reason why I am so critical of the motion—the fact that the poll tax is not clear? Why else do Conservative

councils in places such as Warwickshire and, before it changed, Harrogate, claim that high poll tax charges are not their fault?

Mr. Arnold: Because those councils need to discuss the standard spending assessment components. That does not alter the fact that the community charge has provided figures that the ordinary man in the street can understand in comparing one council with another.

The Labour party's hysterical reaction to the community charge is a desperate attempt to create a smokescreen to hide the real figures. Let us consider the charges net of the £140. Our constituents are to receive their bills shortly. In some areas, the local authority is totally under the control of one party. That is the case with districts that have Conservative unitary authorities, such as the metropolitan counties and Greater London. Others have both Conservative shire county councils and Conservative shire district councils. There are 80 such districts, with Conservative councils fully in control, and their community charge next year, net of the £140, will be, on average, £213. Only three districts have Liberal Democrat councils—at a unitary level or on both levels—and their average community charge will be £230. People must pay 8 per cent. more for the privilege of voting Liberal.

Pride of place goes to the 76 districts controlled by Labour councils, where the average charge will be £268—£55 more than the respective Conservative councils. Thus, people must pay 26 per cent. more for the privilege of voting Labour.

Whichever way we cut the mixed two-tier authorities, we find the same phenomenon. For example, the 112 shire districts under Labour county councils will have an average community charge next year of £268, whereas the 152 shire districts under Conservative county councils will charge an average charge of £226—£42 less than the Labour-controlled districts. People must bear a heavy burden if it costs them 19 per cent. more to live under a Labour-controlled county council than a Conservative-controlled one.

If we cut the figures the other way, we see that the 129 Conservative shire districts will charge an average of £227, whereas the 112 Labour-controlled shire districts will charge £274. Therefore, for the privilege of living in a Labour shire district, people will pay £47, or 21 per cent. a head more. However we consider the matter, Labour councils cost more.

The public already know that the people of Wandsworth, thanks to their Conservative council, will pay a nil community charge in the coming year.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Where is the accountability in that?

Mr. Arnold: The accountability comes when, thanks to having voted for a Conservative council and swept away some 30 Labour councillors, Wandsworth residents have a better council that costs them nothing extra this year.

People also know that Conservative-controlled Westminster will charge £36. They may know that Conservative Rochester council will charge £50 and Conservative Wellingborough council will charge £129. The lowest charges in the country will be made by Conservative-controlled councils.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to the figures that he quoted for shire councils? He compared Labour and Conservative-controlled shire councils. Will he confirm that, if we compare those lists with the lists of councils that provide nursery education, we find that Labour-controlled councils make provision for nursery education whereas many Conservative-controlled councils make none. If we compare other lists on the cost of home helps, on the number of places available for elderly persons and on other public service provision, we find better and more services in Labour-controlled authorities than in the ones to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Arnold: Conservative-controlled Wandsworth council provides nursery places for every child. I come from an area controlled by Conservative Kent county council. It has been under Conservative control for 100 years and children in our urban area go to council-provided nurseries. The hon. Gentleman's argument is extremely weak.

The four lowest charges in the country are in Conservative districts. Other districts with low community charges include the borough of Tower Hamlets, which will charge £147.

Mr. Beith: Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Arnold: They may be Liberal Democrats, but they have managed their community charge only after receiving £147 a head in area protection grant and no less than £1,461 per head in revenue support grant. I wonder what kind of record that shows. I am proud to show that the sixth lowest charge is made by the Conservative-controlled borough of Gravesham, where people will pay £153—a reduction of almost a half as a result of the Bill. Those are the six councils with the lowest charges, and it is significant that there is not one Labour council among them.

Let us consider where the six highest community charges will be in the coming year in England. Would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, be surprised to find that all six are Labour-controlled? I shall list them. Lambeth will have the highest community charge—it will be £450, even after the £140 has been taken off. Haringey will have a charge of £420, Bristol will have a charge of £384, Islington's charge will be £376, Basildon's charge will be £355 and Oxford's charge will be £344.

One might suggest that the political complexions of the councils with the six top and the six bottom levels were coincidental, but if we look around England, we see that Labour councils stick out from their respective counties like sore thumbs. In Avon, there is only one Labour-controlled district council, Bristol, which is to charge £384. All the other districts in the county of Avon will be put out charges of less than £310—nearly 20 per cent. less than the one Labour district in Avon. In the county of Cambridgeshire, there are only two Labour councils—Peterborough, where the charge is £267 and Cambridge, where it is £329. All the other districts in Cambridgeshire will charge less than £232—nearly 30 per cent. less than Cambridge city, which is Labour controlled.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend's advice about the disposition of the charges, but perhaps he will say why a guillotine is necessary and why he is not anxious about using a guillotine before the Second Reading, which is against the interests of every

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

part of the House. The House should be more mindful than to rule away its rights to debate and discuss issues of importance such as he is trying to address. We should tackle the question why a guillotine is being imposed before Second Reading.

Mr. Arnold: I think that the constituents of every Member of Parliament also have rights. They have a right to have the £140 taken off their bills quickly. Funnily enough, councils, both Conservative and Labour, have rights, and we should get this measure through the House fast, with the help of the guillotine, so that they can make the necessary calculations and complete their administration.

The county of Essex has only three Labour councils—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I cannot ignore the content of the intervention of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), and I think it would be appropriate if the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) were to try to relate his remarks more closely to the motion.

Mr. Arnold: I am relating my remarks to the urgency with which the people of Essex need to know what the community charge will be for next year so that families can budget. The purpose of the guillotine is that it enables us to proceed rapidly with the Bill so that it can be enacted and the necessary regulations may be immediately passed, so that our constituents may know what the figures are.

There are only three Labour councils in Essex—the districts of Thurrock, which will charge £266, Harlow, which will charge £309, and Basildon, which will charge £355. All the remaining Essex districts will charge less than £260—more than one quarter less.

Let us look at the county where both Opposition parties take the booby prize——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that I can allow the hon. Gentleman to do what he appears to be doing—reciting the poll tax levels of every local authority in the country, which is quite inappropriate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will speak to the motion or recognise that other hon. Members are waiting to take part in what is now to be a short debate.

Mr. Arnold: I am addressing myself precisely to the point covered by the guillotine motion. Our constituents throughout the country urgently wish to know where they stand financially. That is why the Bill has to move at such speed. I am trying to relate precisely the reason why our constituents wish to see their bills. The sort of comparison I am giving is highly relevant to why constituents are asking themselves why they end up with such a bill, even net of the £140, which is uniform throughout the country and which results from the Bill. Those are the sort of questions that people are asking.

The opposition to the Bill and, therefore, the guillotine motion involve the fact that councils have been unprotected. Last year, we had the safety net; this year it is the area protection grants. It is relevant to say that, of the six major recipients of area projection grants, five are Labour councils and one is a Liberal council. When they receive their bills, net of the £140, they will already have received area protection grants in excess of £100 per head.

Opposition Members also argue that the councils to which I have referred have greater needs, which have long been reflected in the standard spending assessments on which the revenue support grants are calculated.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Why does my hon. Friend suppose that, if the guillotine motion were lost, the Bill would necessarily be lost? I passionately support our giving the £140 to my constituents. I agree that they desperately need it, but why is it necessary to have a guillotine? That is the question that I ask my hon. Friend. I have asked it of Ministers and have still received no answer. I have not heard anybody oppose the Bill.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend assumes that the Bill would be lost. The Bill would not be lost; it would be delayed. I am making the point that a delay in passing the legislation would mean a delay in passing the grant and passing the figures to the councils, which would delay producing the community charge bills. Worse than that, it would produce uncertainty for our constituents about the community charges that they will incur. Community charge levels are strongly affected by the revenue support grants that are allocated.

Today, we are considering the £140 that is to be taken off, which will feed through to bills. The consolation for all local tax payers is that the Conservative Government, led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, has recognised the root of the financial problem for local taxpayers—basically the weight upon them. The Bill will decisively shift the balance of taxation. The House should be equally decisive and pass——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman is totally disregarding the advice that I offered him earlier. I hope that he will now relate his remarks more closely to the motion and also have regard to the interests and rights of other hon. Members.

Mr. Arnold: In summary, I am saying that, if we pass the allocation of time motion, we can pass the Bill quickly and our constituents will have £140 knocked off their bills.

6.48 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Through the guillotine motion, Parliament is being subjected to the political tactics of the ramrod to force legislation through without consideration for either local government or national Government. The legislation is being blasted through the House to cover up for the social, economic and political turmoil that the poll tax has caused for the Conservative party.

The Government are seeking to maintain their image of competence. They believe that they may get away with changing the Prime Minister without consulting the people, but they cannot change the whole of local government without consulting the people or the House of Commons. That is what the guillotine motion is about —putting legislation through the House without giving it proper consideration.

Just six weeks ago we debated the Government's £1·7 billion community charge reduction scheme. The revamped scheme was announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who claimed in January that it would benefit 18 million charge payers. That estimate was based on what he called assumed community charge figures. They were well below the actual figures and within days it

was proved that the Secretary of State's claims were grossly exaggerated and that the Government would make considerable savings to offset the cost of that scheme.

Just weeks later, we face more legislation to unpack and unpick earlier legislation. From the word go, the legislation has been piecemeal and half baked. The Secretary of State's recent statement was delayed because his Department could not fulfil his promise to extend help to residents of sheltered housing for the elderly and the disabled, who would not benefit from any of his existing transitional relief schemes.

In the past 13 years, there have been 125 Acts of Parliament directed at local government finance, and 13 of those Acts have specifically changed that finance. I was in local government for about 10 years and at times we could not fix a budget that would last from the beginning to the end of a financial year because the rules were changed within that year. The practical implications were that, when tenders were put out for repairing roofs, they had to be called in again because the financial arrangements had changed. As a result, local authorities found themselves in the worst of all worlds trying to repair roofs in winter.

Legislation affecting local government was passed with great haste and on guillotine motions without proper consideration for the rights of local government. Since I came to the House it has passed the Rate Support Grants Act 1987, the Local Government Finance Act 1987, the Local Government Act 1987, the Local Government Act 1988, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Debate on most of that legislation was guillotined, because most of it was based on the Government's ideological opposition to local government itself.

The Government have adopted the arrogant principle that they know better and do not need to consult before legislation is pushed through. We have seen the fiasco of the community charge. The Bill was introduced in December 1987 and had its Second Reading on 16 and 17 December of that year. There were 35 Committee sittings between 21 January and 24 March 1988 and the Bill was on Report between 18 and 26 April. Debate on Report was guillotined and the amendments could not be properly considered. There are dozens of qualifying statutory instruments which had to be introduced to amend the shoddy legislation of the poll tax.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend forgot to mention another stage of the poll tax Bill. On one day in July 1988, 400 Government amendments from the House of Lords were pushed into the Bill.

Mr. Battle: My hon. Friend has a record second to none in campaigning against the detail of that legislation, but he did not get the opportunity to put detailed arguments. That is why the Government are having to unpick their legislation.

If the guillotine motion is accepted, we can move to the detail of the Bill. However, it is plain that it does not contain the kind of detail that enables Conservative Members to allege that every person in Britain will get a rebate of £140. We shall later spell out the implications of the clauses that relate to special exemptions.

The Government's purpose in pushing the legislation through is to try to reassert two things simultaneously—that everybody must pay a personal head tax and that the poll tax is related to ability to pay. They will not get away with that unless they can show how the poorest, who have to pay the 20 per cent. minimum, will be exempt from that. The 20 per cent. minimum payment should be abolished. Last week the Secretary of State for the Environment told us that people receive a social security rebate on that 20 per cent., but they do not, because everybody has to pay a minimum of 20 per cent.

The prevailing view of Conservative Members is that the poor got a free ride under the rates system and the Government wanted to stop that. People got rebates because their incomes were too low. If low wages and low pensions were tackled, people could pay their way and would not need rebates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman heard me reproach a Conservative Member for straying from the motion. I hope that he will pay attention to the issue that is being debated.

Mr. Battle: Many Conservative Members are not willing to concede that everybody will not receive £140. That should be spelt out loudly and clearly at every stage of debate on the poll tax fiasco and the Government's attempt to unpick it.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for you to apply the guillotine to those hon. Members who stray from the motion?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the shoddiest things about the guillotine motion is that the Government seek to apply it to a Bill about which no details are known and none will be forthcoming? How many of our constituents will get a reduction of £140? The Secretary of State has no idea and, anyway, has no wish to tell the House. Many of my constituents will receive nowhere near £140. They will get about £28 to £35.

Mr. Battle: One of the difficulties about our debates is that we do not get time to study the information on which to base the arithmetic. Even transitional relief will be knocked out by the Bill.

The Government are trying to create an image of competence, but such an image cannot be sustained. In tonight's edition of the *Evening Standard*, Lord Hailsham says:

"The knee jerk approach has never worked for forming policy."

What more knee-jerk approach could there be than this guillotine motion? It is ramrod politics. It is not a case of poll tax mark 2 but of the poll tax not only hitting the people who pay but striking at the heart of parliamentary democracy.

6.57 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I shall ensure that the Leader of the House has the agreed time to reply to the debate, because I do not want hon. Members to feel that he is being curtailed.

To those of us who are in favour of parliamentary reform and, on a personal note, of timetabling all legislation, this guillotine is a grave setback. Sensible timetabling should be aimed at ensuring proper debate of important issues and not at removing the very basis of such rights. That is what the debate is about: we are considering whether to take away the basic rights of

[Mr. David Blunkett]

Parliament to debate in detail a substantial measure. It is not a measure that can be nodded through, because it has different implications for millions of people, depending on their circumstances. It is a substantive measure, and it has profound implications for the future.

I say to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) that we are dealing not simply with a litany of poll tax levels throughout the country, but with the circumstances in which people in local government have been struggling to maintain services and to ensure that local democracy prevails. The Bill ensures that the very basis of decision-making in local government is curtailed. Instead of providing for the needs of people, we are providing for political expediency. Today and on previous occasions, Conservative Members have revealed that the proposals in the Bill are aimed at giving the Government a breathing space that will allow them to make changes to legislation that was wrongly introduced in the first place.

Three years ago, the Bill that introduced the arrangements for England and Wales was trawled for three and a half months through its Committee stage. Some of us remember it very well—I ended up in hospital with pneumonia, which was a better experience than debating the wretched measure until 2 o'clock in the morning. Some of my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) have it engraved on their hearts. They lived and slept it day in and day out.

In less than seven hours, after Second Reading and the Committee stage, we shall be asked to approve the transfer from central to local government of the spending of £5·5 billion, reduced to £4·3 billion because of the community charge reduction scheme, when we have not had time to debate the key issues. Again and again, we have called for changes. We have asked the Government to restore the funds taken from local government. We asked on 17 January, when we debated the revenue support grant statement, on 23 January, on Report and Third Reading of the Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill, on 29 January when we debated the revenue support grant orders, on 19 February and again on 13 March when, on Opposition days, we debated the poll tax.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: This point was raised by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others. Apart from the arguments about the guillotine, is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would have preferred the £4 billion to be given to local authorities to spend rather than being used to bring about the objective of the Bill—a reduction of community charges by £140?

Mr. Blunkett: If, in the early hours of tomorrow morning, we manage to discuss the final stages of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman will hear constructive suggestions about how the £4·3 billion could have been used to alleviate people's pressing needs, with such help being allocated according to their financial situation rather than their voting power. We would have altered the tax handout and reduced bills according to ability to pay, rather than giving a flat rate rebate—a replica of the flat rate poll tax. We would have ensured that those who most needed relief received it.

The Bill is not about relief or ensuring that those with the biggest problems are given the most cash back. Like the community charge reduction scheme, it is designed to enable the Conservative party to stagger through the local elections and on to the general election. Never have so many provided so much so often for the benefit of so few. VAT is being increased to lower the poll tax, which we all said three years ago would be an electoral disaster. I recall —no doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr will recall this too—that, late one night, when we were saying that the poll tax would be an albatross around the neck of the Conservative party, the message came through that the Synod of the Church of England had voted that the poll tax was unacceptable and unfair. The Conservative members of the Committee burst into laughter. It was guffaws and jokes all round, showing how indifferent and uncaring they were.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is correct to ask why the guillotine should be pushed through. The simple answer is that his right hon. and hon. Friends are not prepared to debate how the money should be used or how the poll tax could be altered, or to introduce a Bill that, rather than tinkering with the poll tax, would abolish it. Such a Bill could have sped through the House.

I am one of the lucky few. My poll tax in London will be abolished from 1 April because I live in Wandsworth. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members may cheer, but I do not think that there is anything to cheer about when someone who can perfectly well pay his way is to have his dustbins emptied and his streets paved and lighted at the expense of other people elsewhere who will be trying to pay the increase in VAT that the Government are inflicting on them. The burden of providing my services will be transferred from those who can afford to pay to those who cannot. That is nothing to cheer about—it is a disgrace. It shows the way in which the Government treat accountability.

On 24 November, the Prime Minister said:

> "I will tell you about the poll tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about the rates in Scotland. We were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss that was made."

In opposing the guillotine motion, we are saying that the House should not be bounced. Hon. Members should not be expected to take decisions at 2.30 in the morning because the Government want to get the measure through before the Easter recess so that they can reduce bills before the local government elections. Our job is to scrutinise and debate proposed legislation in the interests of those we represent. Parliament is being denied that basic right.

The blame for the poll tax lies entirely with Conservative Members. They invented it and implemented it. The community charge reduction scheme, introduced in January, was supposed to help, with rebates for more than 18 million people. At the Ribble Valley by-election, it was discovered that the people did not think very much of that bribe. It seemed that £1·2 billion would not do, so £4·3 billion was felt to be a better bet. The people of Britain are not so foolish as to fall for that ploy. They will not be fooled into believing that paying with one hand and receiving with the other is anything but a cheap gimmick.

The Prime Minister has the cheek of the devil. Last Saturday, in his speech to the Conservative party central committee, he said:

"The only thing you can be sure of is that a Labour Chancellor will have his hands in your pocket more often than you will."

How could the Prime Minister say that, when he has just increased VAT by 2·5 per cent., and when, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he withdrew further resources from local government, thus helping to create the dilemma in which Conservative Members now find themselves, and which has resulted in the Bill?

The Bill is a simple, shoddy measure to save the skin of the Conservative party. Those who were hardest hit by the poll tax will gain the least, and those who have benefited most from the poll tax will gain the most from the Bill.

The Government are offering bribe after bribe. Schools are bribed to opt out, and voters are bribed to fall in, but voters will not fall for this. They may take their money; they will certainly have to pay their money, but the Conservative party will pay the price.

7.9 pm

Mr. MacGregor: I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on his good sense in choosing to live in Wandsworth when he is in London, but he drew the wrong message from the point that he made. He suggested that the people of Wandsworth will benefit at the expense of people living in other parts of the country who will have to pay the additional value added tax. However, the people of Wandsworth will also have to pay the extra 2·5 per cent. VAT whenever they buy goods or services. The real message is that we are helping the people of Lambeth and——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No. During my opening speech I gave way to every hon. Member who asked me to do so. I do not have long to reply to the debate.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside ought to be worried about the people who live in Lambeth. They are the ones whom we are trying to help by this measure.

I apologise to the House for the fact that I had to be absent for part of the debate. As Chairman of the Services Committee, I was dealing with a number of major issues of concern to the House, including one of the most controversial relating to dogs other than guide dogs being brought into our premises. I have been given a full report of the debate. In the short time left to me, therefore, I should like to make a few points.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), the leader of the Labour party, made a great issue of the guillotine procedure. As my hon. Friends pointed out during the debate, he created an enormity of a precedent for guillotines when he introduced guillotines on five Bills in one day in 1976—the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill, the Health Services Bill, the Dock Work Regulation Bill, the Rent (Agriculture) Bill and the Education Bill. As a result, he became the arch-guillotiner. That is the answer to his point.

As to the question of a precedent, yes I acknowledge —as I have already fairly done to the House—that there are no precedents for guillotining in the way that we are doing today, but it is important to take into account the fact that in a progressive system one sometimes has to take a new step; otherwise, one never does anything unless it is based upon past precedent.

As I said in my opening speech, there are good reasons for using the guillotine procedure in this way. One of them, as my hon. Friends have made clear—in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham)—is that their constituents want the reduction to be included in their bills as quickly as possible. It is a simple and straightforward measure. That is why we believe it is right to get the reduction to them as quickly as possible. Moreover, local authorities need to know where they stand as they approach the new financial year. Those are the two main reasons for wishing to take the Bill through all its stages by means of guillotine.

I notice that the Opposition concentrated on the guillotine motion procedure rather than anything else, but I suspect from the remarks that I have heard during the debate that the point that I intend to make now will be true of the subsequent debates this evening. The Opposition want to concentrate and vote on this motion because they cannot make up their mind about their main policy regarding the Bill. I suspect that they will be afraid to oppose it——

Dr. Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way, especially as he does not have much time to reply to the debate. He cannot get away with all this nonsense. He dictated the time that would be allocated for the guillotine motion. He did not discuss it with us. It is no use the Leader of the House blaming us for the three hours. If he had consulted us, things might have been different.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's point later, if I have time, but he misses my point, which is that, since last Tuesday's statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have listened to all the Opposition's points on the Bill and the policy behind it and taken part in a number of television and radio debates. I have also listened to the points made—apparently on the substance of the Bill—during the debate.

What is quite clear is that the Opposition do not know what to do about their policy. They are afraid to oppose the Bill because they do not want to be seen not to be in favour of reducing the community charge. They make various noises suggesting that the way in which it is being financed is wrong, but they have never come forward with an alternative. It is because they do not know what to do that they concentrate on the speed with which we are getting the measure through. As so often happens, they looked for a smokescreen, the timetable motion, in order to hide the nakedness of their policy.

As for the point made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about consultation, as he recognises, we can attempt to reach agreement through the usual channels, but the timetable is very tight if we are to get the measure through this week. It would have been open to any hon. Member, as we have seen so often in the House, to use the normal procedures to ensure that the Bill did not get through this week. That is why we came to the view that the guillotine procedure, allowing plenty of time for debate, was the right way to proceed. Consequently, I

[Mr. MacGregor]

have to tell the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that that, among other reasons, is why we cannot accept his amendment.

I had hoped that I had persuaded my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) of the reasons for the measures that we are taking. Let me try again. He, like me, is keen to see the Bill on the statute book by the end of the week in order—I repeat straightforwardly—to enable all community charge payers to benefit from the proposal and to enable local authorities to get ahead with the arrangements. That makes sense, since their new financial year starts next week. My hon. Friend agrees with that and is keen that it should be achieved.

I put it to him that we could not achieve it without a proper timetable for debate in the House. We need to send the Bill to the other place swiftly enough to enable it to be considered by the other place and, if necessary, to consider Lords amendments here. Bearing in mind that Friday is Good Friday and that we have the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday, my hon. Friend will see that the timetable is extremely tight. Consequently, we have endeavoured to bring forward a procedure that will enable the House to deal with a short and straightforward Bill in a well considered way and constructively to debate it, thus enabling us to achieve the objective of getting it in place by the end of the week. That is the simple and straightforward reason for the procedure that I now propose. That is why I hope that the House will pass the motion, so that it can then move on to the Second Reading and other stages of the Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 236.

Division No. 104] **[7.17 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony

Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David

Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill—

Second Reading

1. The proceedings on Second Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

Committee, Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings in Committee and on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion seven hours after the commencement of the proceedings on Second Reading or, if earlier, at 2.30 a.m.

Proceedings on going into Committee

3. When the Bill has been read a second time it shall, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of bills), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put and Mr. Speaker shall forthwith leave the chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

4. On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill, as amended, without any Question being put.

Order of Proceedings

5. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings in Committee or on consideration are taken.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, any proceedings on the Bill at this day's sitting shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

7. Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at this day's sitting.

Conclusion of proceedings

8.—(1) This paragraph applies in relation to any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order at this day's sitting.

(2) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) If a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock —

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time; and

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Lords Amendments

9.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed in one day's sitting and shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(2) The Question that the Lords Amendments be considered forthwith shall be put forthwith.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with this paragraph—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the question on any further Amendment of the said Lords Amendment made by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion moved by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the said Lords Amendment, or as the case may be, in the said Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(iii) put forthwith with respect to each Amendment designated by Mr. Speaker which has not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Amendment; and

(iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(c) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to that Lords Amendment.

(4) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (3) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

10. Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

11.—(1) The proceedings on any such further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(2) For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

(ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by Mr. Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal: and

(iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

12.—(1) Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

13.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and on the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Supplemental orders

14.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on this day or the following day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

15. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with after the completion of all proceedings.

Recommittal

16.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages, respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Business Committee

17. Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

7.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Bill before us purports to reduce local government taxation by £140 per head of the electorate of the United Kingdom. It does not, of course, extend to the whole kingdom. I note that, in the case of Scotland, the reduction applies separately to the regional councils and the district councils. We in Northern Ireland have a regional rate and a district rate. How are we to find out about the legislation relating to Northern Ireland? As we do not know whether the Province will be discriminated against, we are quite incapable, at this point, of forming an opinion as to whether we should support the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The matter to which he refers is one for the Secretary of State rather than the Chair. If the hon. Member is fortunate enough to catch my eye later, he may be able to put his question to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Heseltine: As the House knows, in 1976 the then Labour Government began to switch a growing proportion of the costs of local services on to the local ratepayer. That process was continued until last year. If, emerging from our consultation process, there is one thing on which most people agree, it is that reversal of the trend was necessary. This Bill brings about a significant reversal. It gives practical effect to the Government's decision that the central taxpayer should pay more than the local taxpayer pays.

In specific terms, that means that the bills for the coming year's charge must be reduced—but not so as to allow local authorities to indulge in another round of spending increases. Our determination is that the people should benefit. Accordingly, the Government have made a series of announcements explaining how the £4·3 billion that the Chancellor of the Exchequer provided in his Budget is to be used to help people directly. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities said last night in the debate on the money resolution, the financial memorandum to this Bill has to be read in the context of the proposals in the Bill and the proposal to change the community charge reduction scheme. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear, in winding up the Budget debate, that the £4·3 billion covers both the provisions of the Bill and the community charge reduction scheme changes. The Bill addresses the specific commitment to reduce the headline community charges set by local authorities by £140, or, when the charge is already set at less than £140, to reduce it to £0.

We estimate that, instead of an average gross community charge of £392 in England next year, the figure will be about £250. In other words, the average community charge in England will be reduced from £357 this year to £252 next year. In every local authority area, people will

[Mr. Heseltine]

face a lower headline charge than they face this year. The equivalent figures for Scotland are £306 and £253, and those for Wales are £232 and £120.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I apologise for intervening at such an early stage in my right hon. Friend's speech, but there is a point that I am sure he will want to clear up. In today's press, there is a report that councils will be covered for the reimbursement of £140 not on the standard community charge but simply on the normal community charge. Can my right hon. Friend refute that story? It is very damaging in Westminster and in other parts of London, but I am sure that people throughout the country will be concerned.

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Later in my speech I will demonstrate that the suggestion to which he has referred is unfounded.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the Secretary of State was in the House during the debate on the money resolution last night, he will have heard a number of hon. Members, including myself ask the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to ensure that we would be told tonight what proportion of the £140 reduction will be enjoyed by those who are on rebate or on transitional relief. Will such people receive the whole £140, part of it, or none of it?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that question. I was indeed in the House last night, and I heard what my hon. Friend said. I can help the House further. If the existing rebate or reduction arrangements take an individual below the level at which he would pay the £140, we cannot make provision that would double the amount of assistance. To that extent, it is not possible, within the arrangements that we have made, to help further.

What we are trying to do in these schemes is to help people who have been particularly hard hit by the transition from the old rating system to the new community charge system. That is the purpose of the community charge reduction scheme. The new £140 reduction that the Bill provides brings the headline charge down to figures that are below or closer to the old rates the people would have paid.

My hon. Friend was asked about the number of people who would benefit from the arrangements that he was describing and he said that the figure in this current year would be about 8 million people and that he would come back to the House if he wished to add to that figure. I am pleased to take the House a stage further today, because, as a result of the arrangements that we are making and debating today, not 8 million people but 16 million people will be helped. If the House wishes to probe further these matters, which it might well wish to do, my hon. Friend will be pleased to deal with the detail when he replies to the debate.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): How is it then that on 17 January the figure given for those who would benefit from the new schemes was 18 million people? It was not 8 million people, as announced last night—it was 18 million people, and the Prime Minister pronounced on it himself.

Mr. Heseltine: The 8 million referred to the number of people who benefited before the £140 reduction to which the Bill relates. That figure has to be adjusted again to take account of the community charge reduction scheme additional announcements that my hon. Friend made, which takes the figure up to 16 million. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is it not a fact that those who at the moment are paying 20 per cent. of the poll tax because they are on benefit will in the end get £28 out of the Secretary of State's announcement, and that, when they have spent about £1,100 on VAT-rated goods, they will have paid out all that £28 and still have to carry on paying the extra 2·5 per cent?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman takes no account of the fact that many of the most essential things that such people buy are not VAT-rated in the first place. All that the hon. Gentleman shows is the wide range of schemes that already exists to help different categories of people depending on their needs.

As I explained to the House, the headline charge is, in many cases, further reduced by rebates or the community charge reduction scheme. It is only when all those calculations are made that people know what they are to pay. This year, the average net charge is about £275. Taking into account the improvements in the community charge reduction scheme announced last night, the net charge in Britain next year will be less than £175. That is significantly less than the average paid per adult in the last year of the rates.

I should stress one point on which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor laid stress in his Budget. The substantial switch of costs to the centre is not a decision for this year alone. The Government intend the new balance to be sustainable in the future.

The five-clause Bill before the House is designed to implement the first phase of our longer-term strategy. I shall not take the House through it clause by clause; suffice it to say that it extends to England, Wales and Scotland and that, if it is enacted, it will have three broad effects.

First, it will provide that the community charges which authorities have set for 1991-92 are replaced the day after the Bill's enactment by new charges which are £140 lower. Councils will not need to meet to set the new charges, but they will be treated in all respects as if they were set by authorities in the usual way. Secondly, it will suspend charge payers' liability to pay any charges for 1991-92 until they receive a bill reflecting the new charges. Thirdly, my right hon. Friends and I will be empowered to pay grants to authorities to make good the loss of income resulting from the reduction in charges and to cover authorities' additional administrative costs arising as a consequence of the Bill.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Secretary of State clarify the position on the standard community charge? Will the standard community charge be a multiple of the new individual community charge? As I see the Secretary of State nod, does that mean that there will be a substantial reduction in the standard community charge for some enormous second homes?

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman had been here from the beginning of the debate, he would have known that my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr.

Tracey) raised exactly that point, and it so happens that this is precisely the moment in my speech when I wish to deal with it.

There is an incorrect report in *The Times* this morning that councils will not be compensated for the loss of income from standard community charges. In fact, grants will be paid to compensate authorities for loss of community charge income from all charge payers—that is, personal, standard and collective charge payers alike. I welcome this opportunity which my hon. Friend has given me to set the record straight.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does that mean that, in those authorities where the standard charge is a multiple of twice the personal charge, the authority will be reimbursed for twice the charge?

Mr. Heseltine: That is correct.

The charges that we have announced involve local authorities in rebilling. There was no alternative way of achieving our purpose. We could not have made a switch of funding of the size involved outside a proper Budget statement. The House and the wider financial community would have expected to be told how such a switch was to be financed. We could not have acted, either, until all local authorities had set their budgets. There are simply too many authorities which, if they had had any idea that there was more money coming, would have wanted to use it to increase their spending and not to help local people. We were not prepared to put up with that.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the £140 reduction will also be available to local authorities and community charge payers next year? As Labour local authorities have been clearly setting the highest possible community charge that they can get away with this year, will my right hon. Friend confirm now that he will use his capping powers as ruthlessly as necessary to stop Labour authorities ripping off my constituents and those of all other hon. Members next year?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I can confirm that we shall take what steps we think appropriate to prevent an explosion of local authority expenditure as a consequence of the generosity of the settlement that we have made today.

My hon. Friend's other point relates to our determination to keep the balance broadly in line. We have confirmed our intention to do that. Next year, it will probably be appropriate to do that through the aggregate exchequer finance arrangement as opposed to a specific legislative vehicle such as we are addressing today, but the upshot of it will be to preserve the balance broadly as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has described.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Will the Secretary of State also keep the balance between a poll tax in Wolverhampton next year of approximately £275 and that in Wandsworth, where charge payers will pay nothing? My constituents would like to know who will pay for the social workers and teachers in Wandsworth while my constituents, with their many social problems, will have to pay up to £300.

Mr. Heseltine: There is a simple way to meet the hon. Gentleman's objective. If he wants the community charge level of Wandsworth, all he has to do is to vote Conservative at the forthcoming election. I had not intended to make a divisive party point at this stage in my speech, but it is worth repeating that to vote Labour costs, on average, £50 across the country.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend also point out to Opposition Members that a great deal more central Government grant per head goes to the neighbouring Labour inner-London boroughs than comes to Wandsworth? One of the benefits of the Bill that he has not yet highlighted is the extent to which people receiving income support will benefit. The 20 per cent. put into income support is 20 per cent. of the national average community charge. For every council that comes in under the national average—and the Bill will help that to happen—such people will receive considerably more in income support than 20 per cent. of the national figure, and if the council comes in at zero, the whole amount will go into their pockets.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has made a number of interesting points, and has reminded me of some interesting statistics. Wandsworth—a London borough—received £1,192 per adult, and then set a community charge of £137. Tower Hamlets received £1,862 per adult, and set a charge of £287. Hackney received £1,755, and set a charge of £462. Lambeth received £1,557, and set a charge of £590. If Labour Members want me to make comparisons, let me compare Wandsworth's £1,192 with Manchester's £1,170. Manchester set a charge of £432, while Wandsworth's charge was £137. Labour Membrs should think carefully before suggesting that there is no relationship between authorities' profligate spending patterns and the fact that they are Labour-controlled.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the House has heard enough to be convinced that the legislation is essential. We should make progress. We intend to secure the passage of the Bill and any appropriate regulations this week. We have already informed the House in detail of our intentions, and we are writing again to local authorities today, sending them copies of the draft regulations on billing and enforcement. Before the financial year begins, authorities should have all that they need to send out the revised bills. We have made it clear that we shall advance cash from non-domestic rates to compensate local authorities for the unavoidable delay in the collection of their community charge income.

I have been impressed by the determination evident in local government generally—and especially among those to whom I have spoken directly—to convey this excellent new arrangement to local people as quickly as possible. What they have told me destroys the arguments of those who say that, inevitably, no new bills will be issued before June. It would be unforgivable if local authorities now delayed issuing their bills to hide from the electorate the substantial help that the Government have given. I am confident that the great majority will want the new bills to be sent out very soon, and that that end will be achieved.

The Bill is as short as it is important. It helps people. It shifts the burden from local to central taxation. It is a constructive and decisive product of our local government review, and I commend it to the House.

7.53 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I do not often feel sorry for the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I confess that I felt a twinge of sympathy for him this evening. He could not quite conceal his embarrassment, which was bespoken by the brevity of his remarks in support of the Bill.

That embarrassment was partly as a result of the breathtaking cynicism of the measure that the right hon. Gentleman had to propose, and partly due to the extraordinary circumstances—an unprecedented guillotine motion. Mostly, however, it was a consequence of what the Bill, and the Secretary of State's role this evening, tell us about the right hon. Gentleman's part in the attempt to bring the poll tax fiasco to an end.

I think that the right hon. Gentleman's embarrassment stems from the fact that he is now required to present a Bill —in extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances—to implement a measure in whose formulation he really played no part. In this Government of faction and cabal, he was treated as an outsider by the Treasury-dominated group that decided that the Budget strategy should be completely distorted by the need to throw money at the poll tax problem. The Bill may be a Department of the Environment measure, but it was conceived and promoted in the Treasury—a Department that has no understanding of local government, and even less sympathy for it.

We must assume that the decision to promote the measure was made without consultation of the Secretary of State. Presumably even he would not easily have consented to legislation that would require him to stand on his head in quite so spectacular a fashion. It is, after all, less than three months since he came solemnly to the House to present his revenue support grant settlement.

That settlement was presented as the culmination of long and responsible consideration by the right hon. Gentleman. He had, he told us, made his judgment about how much of local government spending should be funded by central Government. He dismissed any suggestion that the settlement represented anything other than a prudent and accurate judgment of the amount that central Government should provide. Yet here we are, less than three months later, with the Secretary of State compelled by his Treasury colleagues to concede that his judgment was wrong—to the tune of a small matter of £4·25 billion. No wonder he seems more than a little discomfited.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall give way in due course; I want to develop this point first.

Nor can the Secretary of State get away with the excuse that he may want to make: that he inherited the revenue support grant from his predecessor, and has recast the settlement according to his own long-held ideas and principles. The settlement that he announced in January did not, after all, come out of the blue. It was very much in line with earlier settlements, which had made a point of reducing the proportion of local government finance to be funded by central Government from that inherited from the preceding Labour Government—a steady reduction over the whole period from 62 per cent. to 35 per cent.

The Minister who initiated that long, consistent and steady process of disengagement——

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: Let me deal first with what the Secretary of State falsely said in his opening remarks. The proportion of local government finance provided by central Government was the same at the beginning of the last Labour Administration as it was at the end: 62 per cent. There was indeed a bobble upwards in the middle to about 65 per cent., but the level remained stable throughout that Administration. The real reduction began when the Secretary of State of the day decided to initiate the process that culminated in central Government funding of only 35 per cent.

Who was that Secretary of State? Who began that process? None other than the present incumbent. The Bill that the Secretary of State has been forced to present to the House today not only runs counter to a 12-year-old pattern set by the present Government; it runs counter to the whole process launched by the right hon. Gentleman himself. There is just a little inconsistency for him to explain away.

Mr. Heseltine: I know that figures are always an embarrassment to the hon. Gentleman, but the fact is that, in 1976, the proportion was 66 per cent. It went down by about 2 per cent. a year until the present Government were elected, and, broadly speaking, it did not go down much more than that throughout the 1980s. The switch began in 1976. Can the hon. Gentleman deny that?

Mr. Gould: I note with interest—and so, I am sure, did the House—that the Secretary of State took great care not to contradict my assertion, which, for the sake of those who failed to grasp it the first time, was that the level of central Government support for local government remained stable at 62 per cent. throughout the term of that Labour Government. The real reduction began in 1979 and reached a low point of 35 per cent. in the right hon. Gentleman's revenue support grant settlement this year.

Mr. David Nicholson: The hon. Gentleman's opening diatribe completely ignores the fact that the £4 billion in the Budget, which will be enacted by this legislation, is intended to reduce the charge to charge payers, not to add to resources for higher spending. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, if the money had been made available before many local authorities had set their budgets, they would have used it to increase spending.

Mr. Gould: What I find interesting about that intervention—although it had no bearing on my argument with the Secretary of State—is that it points to an absolute and unavoidable necessity. If, by any misfortune, this Government are still running things next year, as this trick cannot be turned a second time, the only way to avoid the trap that the Secretary of State has set himself is the solution offered from his own Back Benches—universal capping. That would, in turn, require the Secretary of State to stand on his head all over again. He has gone on record time and time again as against capping and in favour of accountability yet, once again, he has contradicted himself in the space of just a couple of weeks.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: When the Secretary of State announced his community charge reduction scheme, he assured us that it was the last word in making the poll tax fair and workable.

It is no doubt true that a scheme designed to win the Ribble Valley by-election looked a little less attractive and persuasive when Ribble Valley was duly lost. However, it is still a remarkable volte face for the Secretary of State to come to the House so soon to admit by implication that he was wrong and to propose what is, in effect, a general election reduction scheme. To judge by its immediate reception, the new scheme looks as certain as its predecessor to be unsuccessful in its chosen aim.

If the timing of the measure is embarrassing for the Secretary of State, his embarrassment pales into insignificance by comparison with the upheaval that the Bill has inflicted on local government. Virtually every poll tax bill had been calculated, many had been printed and a large number had been dispatched. I have received mine, and I am sure that many hon. Members have also received theirs. The consequence of this last-minute reversal is that 35 million poll tax bills will have to be recalculated, and the millions of bills awaiting dispatch will have to be shredded. There has been nothing more damaging to the Government's reputation than the sight of bales of millions of poll tax bills waiting to be destroyed—a sight that we have seen on our television screens over the past couple of days.

What drove the Government to reverse the position to which they had adhered for 12 years and to inflict such chaos on local government? The only conclusion that we can safely reach is that we are dealing with a Government who are in a blue funk. They are now desperate and cynical in equal measure. They are so desperate that they will clutch at desperate measures. They are ready to try to save their skin at any cost. The cost is not borne by the Government because—as they never tire of telling us—they have no money. The money that they are throwing at the poll tax problem—all £4·25 billion of it—is not theirs. It is the taxpayers' pockets that are being raided.

If there is any justice, there will be a cost to the Government, and they will pay that cost. The whole shabby and disreputable exercise will be carried through at the cost of what shreds remain of the Government's tattered reputation for competence and prudence. Are they competent? To say that they could not run a whelk stall is to insult those in my constituency who continue to run such businesses successfully. If the Government were running a public company, the shareholders would have sacked them long ago before calling in the fraud squad. If they were in local government, whose fortunes they presume to treat in such a cavalier fashion, they would certainly have been surcharged, bankrupted and disqualified.

We should not mince words. On the evidence of this passage of events, we are dealing with a bunch of craven incompetents whose only saving grace is that they are so bad even at incompetence that they have been rumbled straight away.

Are the Government a prudent Government who look after public finance? That can produce nothing but a horse laugh.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Gould: The Government have generously agreed to cover the cost of their bungling. Even they did not dare to ask the poll tax payer to pick up the tab, but we have been given only a blithe estimate that the exercise will cost a mere trifle—just £60 million. Even that little bauble seems certain to be an underestimate on the basis of evidence given to me over the past few days by local authorities, which are aghast at what the Bill will mean to their costs, administration and financial position.

I should like to give some examples. Birmingham says that if—as it will be compelled to do—it must use different software, the printing and dispatch of new bills will cost £100,000 in additional administrative costs, and it will suffer a loss in cash flow of £1·25 million. Newcastle estimates £200,000 as the cost of new calculations and dispatch of bills and a further loss of £700,000 in loss of interest. Peterborough says that its administrative costs will rise by between £50,000 and £100,000 and it will lose £200,000 in interest in one month alone.

The £60 million—unacceptable though it is as the price tag of the Government's folly—will not, on that basis, go very far. I want to know, either from the Secretary of State of from his Minister of State, what calculation lies behind the blithe estimate of £60 million. On what basis was it calculated? How confident is the Secretary of State that he knows the true figure, or is it just one more example of a stab in the dark by a Government whose claims to prudent management must now be met with derision and contempt?

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The hon. Gentleman has spent 15 minutes telling us his views of the Government. Will he, at any stage, tell us why he is opposing the Bill? Is he against the idea of reducing the bills by £140? If he were to have his way and the Bill were defeated, how would he answer the accusation from charge payers that he would have cost them £140 each?

Mr. Gould: It never ceases to amaze me just how out of touch some Conservative Members are. We have here the luminaries of the Tory Back Benches, people who allegedly devote their professional lives to keeping abreast of public matters——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*——

Hon. Members: A luminary?

Mr. Gould: I have not finished demolishing Tory luminaries yet.

We have here luminaries who profess to be abreast of all matters of public concern, but they do not yet know what any idiot could have read in today's newspapers. We are not opposing the Bill—we do not intend to stand in the way of a welcome reduction in the poll tax burden—but we reserve the right to explore the cynicism and disreputable nature of the Bill itself.

It must be recognised that the £60 million fleabite is of little consequence when compared to what the poll tax has already cost, and when we look at the start-up costs and the admitted additional administrative costs per year. The Minister of State is on record as conceding that it will cost £300 million additionally each year.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: We must look at the burden of the lower-than-forecast collection level, which runs at £1·4 billion, and at the sweeteners already announced by the Secretary of State, which amount to £5 billion or £6

[Mr. Gould]

billion. We now add £4·25 billion from VAT. No wonder the Secretary of State can pretend that £60 million does not matter.

Mr. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I give way to the hon. Gentleman to reward him for simple persistence.

Mr. Hughes: The important point about the Bill, which we shall pass tonight, is that it gives us a clear idea, not only for this year, but for the future, of how many billion pounds the new scheme is designed to raise. To help us understand what the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is saying on behalf of the Opposition, will he tell the House how many billion pounds his scheme is designed to raise? We shall then know what size of bill people will get.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman talks about the House becoming clear by the end of the debate precisely how the scheme is to work. I look forward to that clarity. My constituents in Dagenham will be keen to know precisely how many of them will get the £140 reduction that they have been promised. There has never been any mystery about our assertion. The Secretary of State may have changed his mind overnight, but we have always been clear that the balance between central and local government spending has been rigged by the Government and has gone to an extreme that even the present Administration now have to recognise must be corrected.

The £13 billion or £14 billion now thrown at the poll tax is not money that is being spent on a great national project or to improve the quality of life of the people of this country. It is money spent solely and sordidly on saving the Government's skin. Do not let me hear again Conservative Members claiming to be prudent or responsible in the management of public resources.

The irony is that, like so much else about the poll tax, the Bill does not even deliver what it promises. Only half —perhaps not even half—of those who have been promised the reduction of £140 will receive it. Those who receive rebates or who qualify under the community charge reduction scheme will find that their reductions are far less. I do not blame a Government who can make a mistake and then correct it in 24 hours—a mistake of only 100 per cent.

It was a mistake that led the Minister of State to tell us last night, less than 24 hours ago, that only 8 million people would benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. The Secretary of State corrected him today and said that the figure was 16 million. I do not blame an Administration who have such difficulty with figures for being unable to tell us precisely how many people will get the £140. Nevertheless, it is a matter of abiding interest to my constituents. They would dearly like to know the answer, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's answer later.

It is characteristic of the poll tax that those who are most certain of the benefit of the full £140 are those at the top of the income scale. The benefit is worth £274·50 to someone paying top rate income tax. Those at the bottom will benefit to the maximum of only £28, and many of them will receive even less. There is no justice in the famous flat-rate principle, which did so much to discredit the poll tax. The flat-rate principle allows the people of Wandsworth to pay nothing. Whatever happened to the idea that everyone should contribute something? That principle allows the people of Wandsworth to pay nothing, while others get the same £140 and still have to pay £300 a year.

Is it not typical of the Government that, when they filched billions of pounds from local government, they used it to finance income tax cuts to benefit the well-off? Now that they recognise that they have made a terrible mistake which must be corrected, and now that they have unwillingly decided that they must pay back the money, who do they expect to pay it? They expect it to be not those who benefited from income tax cuts, but the ordinary family, who are hard hit by the increase in VAT.

If the money is available, why is it not used to abolish the 20 per cent. contribution? Can the Secretary of State think of a better way? I believe that on this issue, his heart may be in the right place, but I suspect that, again, he has been outgunned by the Treasury. Is there any better way of spending the available money than to remove the misery and despair of people who are terrified by poll tax bills that they have no hope of paying because they have no income with which to pay them?

Mr. Wilson: Does my hon. Friend share my understanding of the reply that I received earlier from the Secretary of State on the flat-rate principle? Not only will the poorest people in the land receive £28 under the new scheme while the better-off obtain £140, but a very wealthy person who owns a substantial second home will obtain £420 from the scheme.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. His intervention shows that, try as they may to wriggle off the poll tax hook, the principle of the poll tax remains to dog the Government. Wherever they go, the flat-rate principle, which the Secretary of State dare not abandon because of the uproar on the Conservative Benches, distorts everything he does in reforming the poll tax.

The real flaw in the Bill is not that it is confused, ill thought out, unfair and chaotic, but that it tries to prop up the poll tax rather than to abolish it. We could be debating today a short Bill which would ensure that this year's poll tax bills would be the last. The Government turned down our offer of co-operation on such a Bill. Instead, we have a Bill that does no more than offer a sop or a bribe, with no guarantee that it is the prelude to the abolition of a tax whose manifest and manifold deficiencies have made the distortions necessary.

The Government are so confused and divided that they cannot decide whether the poll tax is eventually to go. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) spoke the truth—freed from the burdens of office, he had that unaccustomed luxury on the Conservative Benches. He spoke a truth recognised by millions when he said that what is known of the proposals of the Secretary of State can properly be described as "son of poll tax". He pointed to a Government who have lost faith in their own creation, but who dare not dispatch it for good.

In the meantime, we have a shoddy, shabby and cynical Bill. It is a measure designed to mask the stench of the poll tax rather than to bury its corpse. We regard the Bill as deeply disreputable. We shall seek to amend it so that it more nearly serves the interests of the 90 per cent. of public opinion that now wants to see the back of the poll tax.

We regard the relief offered to reduce the burden of the poll tax for some of those who have been driven to despair by its unfairness as no more than a down payment. It is a payment on account on the way to the complete abolition of that hated tax. This is the down payment, but the full price will be paid by the Tory Government at the next general election. That is where the poll tax bill will finally be paid. It is now clear that we must look to that general election and to a Labour victory before we have any chance of abolishing the poll tax.

8.18 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): The Bill, with the other reductions that have recently been announced, will reduce the average community charge payment in England to about £170. So low now are the charges, that no one-person or two-person households will pay more than £2 more than they paid under the old rating system if they have not moved house. The strength of the Bill is that it is a small part of a far wider exercise which is designed to look throughout the local government system—not just at the payment issue or at the method of raising funds, but at services. I commend the Bill and will support it tonight.

The low level of the charge reminds one of the benefits of it. Before there are howls of disbelief from the Opposition, let me point out some of them. For the first time in the parliamentary memory of many of us, we gave the elector full knowledge of what his local authority was doing by making the elector contribute to that local authority expenditure. Putting one's hand in one's pocket —paying for a round at the bar—concentrates the mind marvellously. As a result of that change, local authority budgets were trimmed, sometimes dramatically—there can be no argument about that because that is the truth. The savings were not made in terms of the services given to those who need and deserve them, but by authorities undertaking internal cost reductions.

In my local authority, right down in the county of Devon, well known to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the electors were able to consider what was happening at county hall and in the district councils. When the community charge arrived in Devon, the economic expenditure of those authorities was low, but it was still possible for them to make large and proper expenditure cuts internally.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: My hon. Friend may be being a little unfair to the Opposition: my experience in London is that Conservative authorities cut administration while Labour councils cut services.

Miss Nicholson: Alas, that is so. Many Conservative councils have brought in outside experts to study their budgets to find ways in which they can be trimmed internally. We should not forget the magnitude of councils. They have swelled in recent years, rather like a queen bee fed on special pollen and honey. In this case, the pollen and honey came from the taxpayer's pocket.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Nicholson: No, I shall continue for a little longer if I may.

It would be foolish and inaccurate for Opposition Members——

Mr. Fraser: Tell us about Somerset.

Miss Nicholson: I shall not give way.

It would be foolish and inaccurate for the Opposition to pretend, as they seek to do for the purposes of political debate, that councils are perfect organisations that never overspend and do not put 17 per cent. of their education budgets towards the cost of their staff in county hall.

Another benefit of the community charge is the reintroduction of accountability to local people. That had been lost for many years, particularly under Labour Governments. I believe that accountability is a great and continuing benefit of community charge.

Given that the community charge is so low, why do we not retain it? Many of my colleagues would like to do just that. I believe that there are two good reasons why we should not retain the community charge and I intend to demonstrate that those key weaknesses are even larger and are inherent in the alternative proposals offered by the Opposition.

The first weakness is that the system of collection is too expensive and intrusive. Even the most sophisticated official has found it extremely tempting to acquire more knowledge about the individual elector than he should have done in pursuit of his duty to collect the community charge. Some councils might be in contravention of the Data Protection Act 1984—some are before the Data Protection Registrar now. We must remember the problems of such intrusiveness when we consider the Opposition's proposals.

The second weakness of the community charge is that its gearing bore down too heavily on the individual. Some bills rose greatly, largely under Labour councils that may have been indulging in inappropriate expenditure under current guidelines. I hope that the local government review will root out that problem. It is difficult to see why a special pressure group such as black lesbians in Newcastle should be taught karate, paid for by taxpayers' money. That was unusual. Perhaps the local government review will throw light on what local government does best and where the weaknesses of the current system inhibit decision making to such a degree that it becomes so expensive that it might best be scaled down or scrapped. Despite the current low level of the community charge, I find it difficult to argue that it should be retained, although I accept that it offers good benefits.

The community charge is too difficult and expensive to collect because people move around so much. Every year, 40 per cent. of the population of Islington moves. Given the behaviour of Islington council, one is not surprised at that. If I lived in Islington, I would move as fast as possible to get away from the enormity of the indiscretions committed with local taxpayers' money.

I believe that community charge collection could have been done economically had we had identity cards, enforcement and a single software provision from the centre. The privacy issue, however, is difficult to counter. The Labour party has complained bitterly about what the Government have suggested, but the plans proposed by the Opposition do not bear scrutiny.

The Liberal democrats have advocated a local income tax, but the Labour party has recognised that that is administratively impracticable and could produce enormous local variations. I agree with the Labour party that it would be a difficult tax to introduce. I shall not go into the detail of my arguments against that tax, as it is simply

[Miss Nicholson]

a non-runner because the Liberal Democrats will be unable to persuade the two large parties to adopt that policy.

The electorate should be alerted to the danger in the Labour party's plans. The Labour party is offering a mixture of ideas. It proposes a return to the old rating system, but the Opposition will not recognise that the gearing of that system bears even more heavily on the minority of the electorate than the community charge gearing. It is so atrociously unfair that it is difficult to countenance the return of that system. I find it difficult to believe, however, that the Labour party would care about that unfairness. It would probably believe that such a change would not affect its voters. It would not mind about that small minority if it felt that it could get away with it.

But the Opposition say that the new proposals must be linked with the famous words "the ability to pay". That is where the Labour party gets into difficulty. The only way in which one can focus on the ability to pay other than through the type of proposals that we have on the household tax, which are a rough and ready calculation of how many people there are in a household combined with the rebates that people may receive if they are on income support, would swiftly become unacceptable to the public once they understood what lay behind the change.

Labour's paper states that computerisation of the Inland Revenue

"offers the possibility that means tested rebates . . . could be replaced by an automatic calculation of liability"

and that that

"could be an important step towards a much wider reform, encompassing the benefit system as well as taxation . . . offering the prospect of a single tax benefit transaction between the individual and government".

With breathtaking gall, or with an innocent lack of understanding of modern technology that demonstrates the Opposition's unfitness for government—one can hardly believe that they are so naive—the paper continues by saying that the new system

"protects confidentiality and civil rights"

and

"is forward looking in terms of general taxation".

Of course, it is nothing of the sort. It is a destruction of civil rights and an utter and total destruction of individual privacy, because the only way to focus upon that famous and saleable quality, "ability to pay" is—as the Labour party document properly proposed, although it was improper as regards confidentiality and citizens' rights—by creating one large, Government-controlled computerised record on each citizen in the land. The Opposition do not know—because they do not have the knowledge and they do not even bother to find out—that the Inland Revenue is set up solely for the purpose of collecting inland revenue. It does not contain the number of one's house, where one lives, who one is, how many children one has, one's income, one's stocks and shares, what sort of car one has, and all the other bits and pieces that are needed if one is to tailor raising money for local income to what is so laughably called, "ability to pay".

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): Is the hon. Lady aware that the PAYE system in the Inland Revenue offices contains the names, addresses and postal codes of everyone liable to pay it? If she does realise that, and as she quoted the phrase, "ability to pay" in her earlier comments, does she not realise that a local income tax added to the national taxation system would be easy to collect and would meet the other requirements that she mentioned earlier? Is she aware that all the required information exists and that such a proposal could be introduced within six months?

Miss Nicholson: I do not deny that such information exists on computer records—I know it does and I am well aware of those systems. I argue against a local income tax for slightly different reasons. I believe that we are too small a country for a local income tax to work. It would produce large distortions in people's movements and inequalities for people living one side of a border if there were large differences in demands for local income tax from authorities on the other side of the border. I know that the information exists, but I do not believe that local taxation is a feasible system.

Regarding the other proposals from the largest Opposition party, my comment is not that the information does not exist—indeed it does. For example, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) introduced a change in married women's income tax—which he promoted so heavily, and for which I honour him—that required matching tax points for married women with those of their husbands. Certainly the information exists. However, at the heart of the confidentiality which exists for the individual in the United Kingdom is the determination that the different systems should not be merged—the determination that tax, benefits and everything else known by Government about an individual should not be put on one computer record because then the destruction of personal confidentiality would be complete, and state control in place for ever.

If the Labour party really means what it stated in that paper about such a system offering civil rights protection and confidentiality, may I point out that, before Labour brings it in, it would have to introduce both a personal confidentiality Bill and a Bill that placed a value on information. Labour would have to introduce a sea change of legislation through the House which would take for ever and would be unique to the United Kingdom.

Thus, the Opposition may say that they can put aside the community charge—nothing is easier than to tear up an existing piece of legislation—and immediately put in its place something that is fair, is related to the ability to pay and fulfils the contradictory proposals that I have read out from their document on the community charge and local government, to do so they would in practice have to go through many years of debate and the individual would still be at large risk of Government control.

Time is needed for any genuine alterations to the complexities of local government finance. That is why I believe that the Secretary of State, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister have given that time properly. They have given time for their own proposals to come to fruition and for consultation and they have given time by reducing the community charge.

When we talk about mechanisms for reducing costs, I remind the House that value added tax has two large benefits which have not yet been identified. First, it is lower, as a proportion of equivalised disposable income, for retired people than for working people, so it is good for the retired and the elderly. Secondly, the United Kingdom has a total value added tax—final, private, consumption

expenditure as an annual expenditure percentage rate—that is the second lowest in the European Community. That is because one quarter of value added taxable goods are zero-rated and, on top of that, there are exemptions. No other European Community country offers that, and it gives us the second lowest average of the entire Community.

The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he is critical of raising value added tax, surely cannot have looked at those figures and seen the extreme slowness with which we are pursuing our desired objective of shifting from tax on income to tax on expenditure.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the hon. Lady aware that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer seems to be very much in favour of bringing our VAT rates into line with the rest of Europe? In the end, that would also involve putting VAT on some essentials such as food. Does she support such a move?

Miss Nicholson: Again, I think that the former Chancellor's words may have been paraphrased inaccurately to reflect his speech. There is no possibility of bringing value added tax in line throughout Europe, because it is as varied as it is interesting. It is unique to each country. There is a 33 per cent. difference between the bottom and top band of value added tax, which would suggest that there will never be one VAT band for the Community in 1992, or whenever. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman studies again what my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby said.

Mr. Dickens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way during her excellent speech. Does she agree that there is a certain appeal about value added tax, because the millions of foreign tourists that flood into the United Kingdom on holidays and shopping sprees will now contribute more to local government finance, as we do when we go on holiday abroad? That is important. Our system has to be fair and affordable. We are making it affordable at the moment to help people through this difficult time. Does she not agree that we shall produce a fair system?

Miss Nicholson: I agree with my hon. friend that the millions of incoming tourists will enhance our local government tax-raising capacity by spending more, especially since tourists will spend more on the sort of items that take them into the higher bands of expenditure. It is worth remembering that people have to spend £13,500 a year before the additional 2·5 per cent. would affect their expenditure. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that tourists will contribute more.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced the Bill with his usual intellectual rigour, clarity of expression and—*[Interruption.]* I am fascinated that Her Majesty's Opposition, having had their own cover blown wide open by me, have not even come back on my central point of attack on their proposals—I am bound to think that the admitted deficiencies in our education system are being reflected in their lack of numeracy. Is it possible that Opposition Members have not read their own document? Is it even more possible—or even probable—that they cannot add it up?

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has shown an openness to the House and the electorate in embarking on various stages of consultation as he develops these matters that affect us all domestically and locally. I believe that that true consultation will be a hallmark of this Prime Minister's Administration. The electorate will welcome it, just as we welcome the Bill tonight.

8.40 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): There is a certain pleasure in seeing the rout of the Government over the past eight days. Eight days is, indeed, a long time in politics, because it was only last Monday that the Prime Minister spoke to Tory Back Benchers, explaining that the poll tax was "uncollectable" because of the number of people not paying it and the courts being overloaded. On Tuesday, the Chancellor made his announcement about "shifting finance". On Thursday, we had a classic understatement from the Secretary of State for the Environment that "people are not persuaded" that the poll tax is fair. Last night, the right hon. Member for Blaby, (Mr. Lawson) who made one of his rare appearances in the House to collect his pocket money, told us all about "Son of Poll Tax". If the Government stay in office, we may well get what a Hammer horror producer might introduce as "Poll Tax II: Return of the Undead", so much is the poll tax still part of the thinking of the Government.

Those of us who have been most directly involved in the anti-pool tax campaign take a certain vicarious pleasure in witnessing the past eight days of Government by the headless chicken tendency. We now have an unprecedented "24-hour Bill" in the Chamber, which will pass through Parliament in just one week.

As was suggested earlier, what is happening has not passed unnoticed in my learning curve. When we have a Labour Government, I hope that Conservative Members will find no cause to complain if I venture to suggest to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they can abolish the House of Lords in a week or introduce a "General Nationalisation of Industry Bill" in one night. Such measures could also be applied to Scotland and we could give a future Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the general power to nationalise. I advise Conservative Members that they will see in the months ahead what we have learnt tonight.

However, the real victory does not belong to tonight's debate—it belongs to the millions of people outside this place who refused to be browbeaten or intimidated and who participated in what an article in tonight's *Evening Standard* calls the

"most successful civil defiance campaign in living memory".

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has said that 14 million people have either stopped or never started paying the poll tax. On Tuesday last week "Newsnight" put the figure at 15·7 million people—I presume that Scotland has at last been included in the figures. On Monday, the Prime Minister said that the figure was 18·5 million people. That achieved what many of us were told was impossible, especially by the press. It forced the Government to make a humiliating U-turn before a general election. I have no doubt that, in drafting the Bill, the Tories had a general election in mind.

The Bill legitimises non-payment for the next three or four months. In a written answer on 19 March, the Secretary of State stated:

"The Bill will suspend the liability of charge-payers to pay any 1991-92 charges until a charge bill has been received reflecting the reduced charges."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 49.]

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

That answer means that people need not pay at least until May, or perhaps even until August. The Government have at last legalised non-payment.

As I have said, victory belongs to those millions of people. It is not a victory against the poll tax but, as I know from personal discussions during the past eight days, it is a catharsis for all the Government's attacks and intimidations on ordinary people in the past 12 years. I refer to their attacks on the miners and on other communities, to the hospital and school closures, to what happened at GCHQ and to other unions, and to the privatisations. The past eight days are a sweet revenge on the Government for all those past attacks.

The Bill and the Secretary of State's review will result in an alteration to the law after the challenge to that law took place outside Parliament. It was ever thus. The right of people to vote for Members of this place, the right to join a union or to take industrial action were first established outside Parliament and later legitimised by the passage of legislation or by bad laws being repealed. That is what we are seeing beginning tonight—the repeal of a bad law because of a challenge from outside Parliament.

Unlike the charges that I and others have faced from Conservative Members, there was never what was so perversely pictured by Conservative Members—there was never any intention to widen the battle or to generalise law breaking. I challenge any hon. Member to prove the opposite. Those who have not paid their poll tax or who delayed paying it have not in any way encouraged general lawlessness. They simply wanted to see the repeal of the poll tax legislation, and we are seeing the start of that tonight.

If the Bill is enacted, the reduction of £140 in bills will have been brought about by individual sacrifice. I should like to mention by name some of the people who have made sacrifices so that they are part of the record. They include Brian Wright, Pat Westmore and John Aves. They are the three people who have gone to prison in England for not paying the poll tax—only two days ago in the case of John Aves.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Good.

Mr. Nellist: You will notice, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a Conservative Member has said, "Good." Presumably he is the same hon. Member who voted for the Tories to change the law in November 1988 so that no one in Scotland could go to prison for being in debt. That can happen only in England and Wales.

I pay tribute also to those who lost their liberty through arrest during the past two years, most notably a year ago at Trafalgar square. I pay tribute also to my constituent, Bob Pheelan, who died outside Coventry magistrates court after being forcibly removed by the police during a poll tax hearing last year.

After what has happened and the passage of the Bill, there will be a reduction of £140 in the poll tax. But what would have happened if we had all paid or tried to pay the poll tax? Many millions of people would have had to go into debt, take their cars off the streets, cancel their holidays or deny things to the kids. We would not have had the extra transitional relief that was given in recent months, or the relief that the Government have offered to millions of families in the past 24 hours. There would have been no review and no climb-down. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) would still be ensconced in No. 10 Downing street. Those who told us that by not paying our bills we were increasing other people's poll taxes will have to realise that by not paying our bills we have reduceed everybody's poll tax by £140.

The Secretary of State has said that there is "no other way" than the way that he has chosen. He is almost resurrecting "TINA" to justify what he has done. He has said that there was "no other way" to achieve the reduction other than by raising VAT. I shall suggest another way to him in view of the answers that he and his Department have given me this week. They provided the figures to prove it. The right hon. Gentleman could have cancelled the debts of all the local authorities in this country and relieved them of more than £6,000 million a year in interest charges alone, which could have reduced the poll tax by £200 per person.

If the Secretary of State thinks that that is not possible, I refer him to the figures that he gave me on 19 March about the exact amount of local authority debt. A year ago, his Department gave me the figures on the amount of interest charges paid by local authorities each year. If the right hon. Gentleman were to cancel those debts, it would have the additional welcome effect, even for Conservative Members, of reducing every pound of rent paid by council tenants—by 27 per cent. in the shire counties and by 34 per cent. in the metropolitan authority areas. That is the percentage of rent that passes immediately out of the back door of the council buildings on debt interest charges.

Some Conservative Members may say that that policy is impossible, but they would have said that this Bill was impossible just two or three weeks ago. I must advise them, however, that debt cancellation is a regular tool of this Government. In a reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) on 13 March, the Minister showed how £15 billion-worth of debt was cancelled—£3 billion for British Telecom £1·7 billion for the new towns £4 billion for British Steel and £5 billion for the water companies—to ensure that the Government's mates in the City had a better deal on privatisation.

In a press release the Government said that the average community charge or poll tax after the Bill would be £252. If they cancelled debt they could have brought it down by a further £100 per head—in other words, to £152. They admitted on 26 February to the Tory Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) that that is what the poll tax would have been if they had kept the rate support grant at the same rate since 1979 when they took office, instead of cutting over £57 billion from local council support in the last 10 years.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East) *rose—*

Mr. Nellist: I am afraid that I cannot give way, as I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

Why are the Government in retreat? It is certainly not because they have seen the error of their ways or realised the injustice and unfairness of the poll tax. They have not even offered to reinstate the social security cuts, the axing of benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds, or the ending of housing benefit in certain areas, which has hit many of my constituents even more than the poll tax.

I vividly remember accusing the right hon. Member for Finchley for her treatment of a 33-year-old widow in Coventry who had lost £25 a week because of the axing of

school meals for her four children and the cuts in housing benefit. Cuts in minimum wages, maternity grants and health and safety will not be restored. The difference was that, while we had to co-operate in our own robbery by going to the post office and paying over the money owed to the council, 18·5 million people not only said no, but had a framework in the Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions, which allowed battle to be joined and won against the Tories.

Those who said that that was impossible must realise that millions have crossed a barrier in the last 12 months. They remember what a famous American president said at his inauguration ceremony:

"the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Millions realised that, if they did not pay a civil debt, the Government would be forced into the most humiliating retreat. It will not finish now. If the Chancellor can cancel £870 million of corporation tax in a full year by reducing the tax from 35 per cent. to 33 per cent. and backdating the cut to 1 April last year, we can demand that poll tax payers who went into debt to pay to pay their poll tax should get the same alleviation from this year's bills as the Tories are prepared to give off next year's hardship. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) reminds me that people in Scotland ought to receive compensation for the previous year's poll tax.

If the Government can cancel debts for their friends in Rover, Rolls-Royce, Harland and Wolff, British Telecom, the electricity and water undertakings, and so on, they can cancel the outstanding debt of the people who are facing prosecution for not paying their poll tax. The Secretary of State has said that he will continue to enforce payment. Do Tory Members realise that that means that 18·5 million people face court proceedings? According to information given to me by the Department, as at 31 December 2·2 million people had been summonsed, 77,585 had turned up in court, and 9,785 hours of court time had been taken up.

The Prime Minister has said that the courts are overloaded. What will he say if the Government try to prosecute another 15 million people? Where will they put all the people if seizure by bailiffs and deductions from wages and benefits do not work, as will be the case? Will they send them to prison? Do they not understand that there are already 45,000 people in prisons which were built to hold 43,000? There is no way the Government could put 15 million more people in prison, and even if they could, do they not realise that it costs £380 per week to keep a person in prison? That should be compared to the amount owed in poll tax.

The position is not getting better. Only 10 days ago the Audit Commission said that in the shire counties only 82 per cent. were paying the poll tax, in the metropolitan counties 73 per cent., in outer London 77 per cent. and in inner London 66 per cent. Collection is dropping like a stone.

When the Tories had their leadership contest in November, people stopped paying because all three candidates said that they would abolish the poll tax. When the Government announced the introduction of the Bill last week, people stopped paying in droves. Let the Government ask any local authority treasurer if they want to find out what the position is. It can only get worse, because the Government are legitimising non-payment for the next three months at least.

Under the Bill, the Government will be robbing Peter to pay Paul. We are supposed to feel grateful for the increase in VAT. According to an article in "Economic Trends" in May 1990, the poorest 10 per cent. in the country spend 9·2 per cent. of their disposable income on VAT, compared to 5·7 per cent. for the richest 10 per cent. The Library has worked out for me that, with the increase of 2·5 per cent. in VAT, those percentages will become 10·8 and 6·6. Again, the poorest will pay so that the richest can benefit. That will not go down well.

We should have had not this Bill but a measure immediately to abolish the poll tax. I and millions of people welcomed the motion put before the House by my party on 13 March. That was the clearest statement ever that our real alternative is the abolition of the poll tax.

The Government are in retreat. On the middle east they said that there should be no ceasefire until there was agreement on all the terms. Those involved in the anti-poll tax movement should follow the Government's advice. They should seek the complete abolition of the poll tax, an amnesty for those facing court proceedings, and compensation for those who tried to pay their poll tax.

We must seek an answer to the real question put by parents today from Tory Warwickshire. I do not see any right hon. or hon. Members from Warwickshire in the Chamber. Those parents came to appeal to hon. Members not to agree to anything which would allow capping to remain or insufficient funding of local authority services. The parents told me today that in Warwickshire, which has been a Tory shire for 100 years, pre-school education is under threat and they face the closure of homes for the elderly, the closure of day centres for people with learning difficulties, and curtailment of youth services. That is not in a Labour inner-city London borough but in a Tory shire county.

The main lesson that the people have learned over the past three years in Scotland and the past two years in England and Wales, epitomised by the climb-down of the Government, is that if they struggle they can win. They can force concessions and even beat back the confident Tory Government. That knowledge will be absorbed not only on the poll tax but by those facing hospital closures, school closures, factory closures or redundancy. They will realise that if they get off their knees and stand up they can beat the Tories.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Several hon. Members are seeking to speak. I appeal for shorter speeches, so that I may call all those hon. Members.

8.58 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I trust that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) will forgive me if I do not follow his unreconstructed approach to life. His was the sort of speech with which the late Enver Hoxha would have been pleased, but I suspect that it would not play all that well with the Leader of the Opposition. Listening to the sheer horror of some of his ideas about what he would like a future Labour Government to enact sent shivers down the spines of not only his right hon. Friend but all my right hon. and hon. Friends on this side of the House.

I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is not in the Chamber. I wanted to congratulate him on spinning out for 25 minutes a speech that basically said little. I knew that he was in serious

[Mr. Simon Burns]

trouble when he started recycling the jokes that he made to the House 13 days ago during the Supply day debate initiated by the Labour party on the community charge.

Only the most churlish of people will not welcome the £140 reduction in community charge bills throughout England. It is to be welcomed, because it will mean that the bill of every community charge payer in the country will be slashed. I believe—I have never made any bones about it—that the principle behind the community charge was right. I genuinely believe that everyone who uses local authority services should make some contribution to the provision of those services. Regrettably, the community charge was made unacceptable by the level of bill imposed on far too many people for the provision of those services. That is why it was necessary to produce a Bill of this nature. I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for the Environment on the way in which they have acted to reduce people's bills. My right hon. Friends will bring genuine help to everyone in England and correspondingly in Scotland and Wales.

The Government have identified a problem which has been apparent to all—the level of community charge imposed by the vast majority of local authorities. The Government listened to the arguments and decided to take action. Several Opposition Members have criticised the fact that the Bill is proceeding through the House in one day. If we had not made it do so, we would have been criticised for not taking decisive action when it was needed.

Some Opposition Members said that we should have introduced the Bill two, three or four weeks ago. If we had done that, local authorities would have known what we intended to do before they set their community charges, and would simply have hiked up their spending to thwart the change that is bringing the benefit to people.

Mr. Wilson: As he is on the chronology of these matters, and for the benefit of those who read the debate, the hon. Gentleman will wish to place on record his proud membership of the Committee which considered the Local Government Finance Bill and the fact that he supported every dot and comma of the Bill. All the points made by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and all the other Tory Members who are now being held to account were spelt out to them in Committee. Will he confirm that?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I was disappointed when he left the Chamber about 15 minutes ago, because, having read the newspaper article that he wrote in a Sunday Scottish paper——

Mr. Wilson: *The Independent on Sunday.*

Mr. Burns: —I apologise; it was in *The Independent on Sunday* about six months ago about hon. Members such as me who served on that Committee and some of the comments that we made, I suspected that the hon. Gentleman would raise the matter again during this debate if I had the opportunity to speak.

I will answer his point. I reiterate what I said about three minutes ago. I make no apology for believing that everyone who uses local government services should make a financial contribution of some degree to the provision of those services.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Presumably the hon. Gentleman does not take the view that paying general taxation is sufficient, because that was rejected with contempt during the debates on the poll tax. Is he distressed by the fact that apparently we are now committed under the Government's new scheme to a household bill which will mean that there will be no legal liability for anyone but the householder? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Burns: Before Opposition Members start giggling like schoolgirls, they should listen, because they may learn something.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) correctly said, there will be a single bill. But as far as the plan has been announced—it is only the skeleton —*[Laughter.]* Hang on. We know that part of the bill will be based on the value of the property and the other part will take into account the number of adults living in that property. Although the bill will go only to the household, it will contain an element that reflects the number of people living in the property, and therefore the number of people using and benefiting from the services.

The Bill will result in my constituents receiving a reduction of £140 in their community charge bills. For a household of two, there will be a reduction of £280. The community charge set in Chelmsford on 6 March was £363, a reduction on the previous year. There would have been an even greater reduction, because Essex county council came in at £49 million below SSA, but, sadly, the Liberal-controlled Chelmsford borough council again increased its spending by substantially more than its SSA. So Chelmsford was to have paid for the profligacy of that council, which will be getting its marching orders on 2 May, after which it will no longer control Chelmsford.

As the Bill will mean a reduction of £140 from the £363 that would have been charged, excluding some of the parishes in parts of my constituency, there will be a community charge of £223 per person. For two people in one house, the bill will be £446, substantially less than the average rates bill of £680 in the last year of rates.

Calculating from the community charge what the rates would have been had the old system been maintained—I understand that it would mean a 10 per cent. increase on the rates—the average rates bill in my constituency would have been £750. So the vast majority of my constituents will benefit from 1 April in the coming financial year as a result of the Bill. I shall vote wholeheartedly for the measure, because it will be in my constituents' interests.

Mr. Rooker: And in the hon. Gentleman's interests.

Mr. Burns: That is so, because my wife and I live in my constituency and will pay the community charge there. What applies to my constituents applies to me, so the hon. Gentleman's comment is self-evident. The same is true of all hon. Members who live in their constituencies.

At £446 for two community charges in my constituency, the vast majority of my constituents will be winners and will not mind making a contribution to local government finances. They objected, with reason, to the unacceptable charge of £392 in the current year, which represented £784 for two people. That caused hardship and was considered to be unfair. Let us not forget that the reduction as proposed has nothing to do with the local authority that set the charge in Chelmsford. The Government have simply taken steps to rectify the problem.

The Government will also be helping local authorities with the bills that will be going out for the new community charge. I urge the Secretary of State for Scotland to raise with the Secretary of State for the Environment an important point concerning the sending out of those bills. Chelmsford borough council set its community charge this year on 6 March. By 20 March, within a couple of weeks, the bills had gone out to 20,000 households.

This legislation will probably be on the statute book by Thursday, when we go into recess. We have been told that instructions are being sent to local authorities to enable them to begin preparing the new bills. I assume that they will receive all the instructions and information that they need by the end of next week. If so, it is in the interests of many local authorities throughout the country to ensure that those new bills are not delivered through the letterbox before 2 May, so that they can spread confusion and misunderstanding about the community charge reductions until after polling day. That will enable them to milk that confusion for as much political advantage as possible.

Can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland do anything, even if it means amending the Bill, to ensure that bills are delivered before polling day? Unless local authorities can show the Department of the Environment that there is a good reason why they could not be delivered, I believe that should be done.

Too many councillors and political parties are afraid of the implications of the Government's reduction of the community charge. Many hon. Members are trying to denigrate the scheme and spread confusion because they do not want people to be able to judge those implications before they cast their votes. They should be allowed to vote knowing precisely what they must pay. I hope that, notwithstanding the reassurances from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the Government will ensure that, however people vote, they do so knowing exactly what they will pay for their local government services in the financial year 1991-92.

9.11 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): That is an extremely difficult act to follow. It is now clear that, whereas Eastbourne disposed of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and Ribble Valley disposed of the poll tax, this Bill, which is being rushed through the House in one day, is an attempt by the Government to stop their being disposed of at the forthcoming general election.

The debate was preceded by headlines in the national press such as, "Everybody will get £140 off their poll tax bill." They will not. The press reported that because of a letter dated 19 March from the Department of the Environment to local authority chief executives, which said that there will be

"legislation to reduce the community charges set by local authorities for 1991/1992 by £140."

Local authority chief executives throughout the country who received that letter knew that it was ambiguous in the extreme, and they did not know how to respond to local inquiries. When picking up the information from the Government, the national press could do no better than translate what they thought the Government were saying. Earlier today, the Government gave more information to try to explain what they had in mind. The information given to local authorities has led to utter chaos.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) should want poll tax bills to land on the doormats of his constituents before 2 May. Thousands of his constituents think that they will pay nothing because, previously, they paid less than £140. In reality, they will pay a great deal, and their rebates will be less.

The poorer people in our communities will be hit harder. There is little joy in the Bill for students or those on income support. I have just heard during the debate that there is rather more joy for people who own second homes. If that is the level of what the Government are trying to do to give the poor some economic relief, it would be better for those poll tax bills to arrrive on doormats before the elections on 2 May. I am surprised that Conservative Members have not received the same volume of letters as me in the past few months from people who cannot afford to pay their poll tax.

In Eastbourne, the poll tax for the coming year has been set at just over £400. The council is controlled by the local Conservatives, who, I am glad to say, will not be there much longer. However, people who have to pay a 20 per cent. contribution will receive only between £20 and £30 relief under their proposals. The relief that they want is to pay nothing. They do not have the "ability to pay", whether it be £50, £60 or £82·80.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Bearing in mind what the hon. Gentleman said earlier, will he encourage the chief executive of Eastbourne council to get the bills out before 2 May?

Mr. Bellotti: The chief executive of Eastbourne tried to rescue the poll tax bills from the post office and, due to co-operation from the staff, they have not been delivered. He and his staff now face the mammoth task of trying to understand the information sent out by the Department of the Environment. On television last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) said that it should be an easy task, because one merely had to knock £140 off the bills. That is what he believed then, but today we know that it is not true.

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is talking nonsense because what I said appears in the transcript. I clearly said that, for those councils that have sent out bills—only 15 per cent. have—there might be a way to ask people to make a deduction, which could be corrected afterwards, but that was not the point that the hon. Gentleman was making. It is perfectly clear to the hon. Gentleman, although he and others wished to distort it, that the £140 was to come off the figure fixed by the council, as he has just read out from the letter. Obviously, rebates and the reduction scheme apply after the figure has been fixed. He knows that, he has always done so, and he is simply trying to deceive people.

Mr. Bellotti: I am grateful for that intervention, because it clearly shows that the hon. Gentleman does not understand how the system proposed by the Government will work. If he thinks that the majority of people will be able to perform their own calculation of the rebate available after tonight's announcement, I challenge him to make his own calculation and see how long it takes.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to answer the question asked of him by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans)?

Mr. Bellotti: I am sure that, if the hon. Member for Wyre did not like my answer, he will be able to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not intend to take further interventions, because many other hon. Members wish to speak, and I have already been generous enough.

I am sure that there are hon. Members from Scotland here who wish to be called in the debate. The estimates of billing in Scotland will be even more difficult to send out to Scottish constituents than those in England, for reasons that I am sure Scottish Members will know—the timetabling of billing Scotland. I am sure that hon. Members who represent Scottish constituencies will outline those problems.

It is interesting that the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities is no longer with us. In October 1990, just five months ago, he said:

"The community charge is a courageous, fair and sensible solution. Far from being a vote loser . . . it will be a vote winner and launch us on a fourth term."

If I had made that statement, I should want to leave the Chamber during the debate, despite my responsibilities.

The core reason for tonight's debate has been referred to. Since 1979, the Government have taken back from local authorities nearly £58 billion that they should have given. The £4·25 billion that they now propose to make available to enable local authorities to reduce the poll tax is but a mere trifle compared with the funding that should be there.

The principle of the poll tax is that everyone should pay. What about Wandsworth, where no one will pay for the services because of the high Government grant? The Bill is no more than a bus stop on the road to a new system of taxation—two taxes instead of one. Only one system of taxation will meet the needs of local communities and ensure that services are delivered. People who can afford to pay will do so, but those who cannot need not. That system is, of course, a local income tax. Such a system works in Japan and in Denmark, which is smaller than this country. It works in America and Germany, and it would work here. The Government should urgently examine a system of local income tax. Conservative Members seem to advocate the return of some form of property tax, combined with a poll tax of sorts, but that would produce burdens for millions of people.

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bellotti: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Ross: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can clear up a matter which puzzles me and, I am sure, puzzles many hon. Members. How much of local government expenditure would be met from his party's local income tax, and what would be done about the business rate?

Mr. Bellotti: Our system of local income tax is extremely easy and would mirror the systems in some of the countries that I have mentioned. The level would be about 5·5p on the standard rate of income tax. That is a Government figure that we asked for.

The Bill will make it more difficult for local authorities to collect the money they need. For example, people on income support and students, who last year could not pay the poll tax, will have to contribute next year, and that money will cost a great deal to collect. Conservative Members say that everybody should pay something towards local services. If the cost of the collection is greater than the sum that would be realised, should the local authority continue to pursue the collection? That is not cost-effective government or cost-effective taxation.

The Bill is designed to dig the Government out of the poll tax pit. Its effect is to draw attention to a Government who have clearly run out of steam and out of policies. They should soon be run out of office.

9.22 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) that whatever system we move to should not be based on the principle that everybody should contribute to the cost of local government. About 70 per cent. of defaulters are those who are supposed to pay 20 per cent., and it is nonsense to pretend that an increase in social benefits will be passed by the recipient to his local council. That has been proved not to be true, and we should stop pretending that it will be. We should acknowledge that, if people do not have enough money to contribute to local government, they should not be expected to do so. That principle applies to central Government taxation.

It is clear that there is to be a reduction of £140 which applies to the charge set by councils. On that there will be rebates and the benefits of the reduction scheme. The central question relates to the proportion that is to be raised locally. This scheme reduces that sum from about £12 billion to about £8 billion. That seems perfectly reasonable, because the last time that the rates were used, they raised about £8·7 billion after rebates and reliefs. That is about where it should be.

I do not understand the figures used by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who opened for the Opposition. He said that, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was last at the Department of the Environment, the proportion of the rate support grant fell to 35 per cent. That is not true—or is true only on the basis of a peculiar calculation. I have figures from the Library showing that, in 1986, the proportion was still 54 per cent.

Despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) may now claim, he was the man responsible for slaughtering the proportion of that grant and hence the poll tax mess we are in. It could not be said to have happened earlier, unless one works on the calculation used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), which includes all local authority revenues, such as the housing revenue account. That is how he can say that the local proportion has gone down from 20 to 11 per cent., but one cannot then claim, as the hon. Member for Dagenham did, that it was 60-odd per cent. under Labour Governments. On the basis of that calculation, we brought the proportion steadily down to 54 per cent. Then, with the community charge, it fell significantly.

In the last financial year, the community charge raised 37 per cent. of local authority income. We have now reduced that by just over £4 billion. I believe passionately that that position should be maintained. To say that that will be the approximate contribution from now on should be the Government's first commitment in the new system, but I do not want the money to be poured out indiscriminately in the form of untargeted central grant. If a proportion of funding is to be transferred to the centre —which is what the Government are doing—it should be

targeted on services. There should be a general Government grant, the RSG, a uniform business grant, which we already have, and an education grant.

The education service has distorted local government ever since the mid-1950s. In 1957, when we moved away from specific percentage Exchequer grants for education, all the local authority associations, all the teaching unions and the Labour party condemned the Conservative Government. They said, rightly and understandably, that it would be wrong to move to a block grant because education was too important to be considered on the same plane as refuse disposal, parks and libraries. They said that some authorities would spend money intended for education on other services, that standards across the country would be far from uniform, that there would be growing disparity in education provision and that we should not be able to deliver national priorities in education policy. They cited the fact that there was a Russian satellite going round that year to prove that technical education was important.

They were right, and we have not delivered national priorities in education. However, the same people now condemn the attempt by some of us to move to a central education grant. They claim, for some reason, that it would lead to a gigantic central bureaucracy which would deny local democracy. It did not do so then and would not do so now. It would be good for education and for local government.

A royal commission, the Redcliffe-Maud commission, based its entire structure of local government on the optimum number of people required to run an education service. That is how far education has distorted local government. It is still distorting council budgets, accounting for 60 per cent. of a country's resources. For heaven's sake let us get back to raising locally a proper local services tax, with national services paid by national Government.

How should we fund that remainder? I have some suggestions for my right hon. and hon. Friends. We must go back to a property-based tax. Every sensible, sophisticated, modern western economy has one. The question that remains, however, is on what principles to judge the value of property. The Inland Revenue valuation service would like to revalue every house in the country as often as possible. Many more valuers would have to be recruited and they would have a lot more to do, but it would be daft and unnecessary. We do not even need to obtain modern capital valuations. We certainly do not need to do what my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby suggested—have a rolling programme over 10 years. If we did that, by the end of the process the valuations that we started with would be completely irrelevant. The process is an abstract concept. It is a theoretical, undesirable norm that is irrelevant in practice.

What matters to the people of, say, Leeds, is not whether their semi-detached houses are valued on a similar basis to semi-detached houses in Luton. What matters to them is whether semi-detached houses in Leeds relate properly to terraced houses in Leeds and big, detached houses on the edge of Leeds. I believe that we could move instantly back to a sensible categorisation of properties by using values already on the computer. They are already used for the collection of water company charges. Those values are not irrelevant and dead; they are used now. Local authorities would categorise properties within broad bands, on the basis of existing local authority valuations.

To take Leeds as an example—I made a speech on the same issue months ago in the House—if we used the old valuations, properties valued at below £100 would be within category A. Properties valued at more than £1,000 would come into the highest category. Most of the properties in Leeds were valued at between £300 and £450. There could be a band for properties valued at between £100 and £300 and another for properties valued at between £500 and £1,000. That would stop the nonsense of properties being revalued when their owners improve them by adding a bit on, or installing central heating. We do not want individual revaluations of property. That causes enormous irritation, imposes an enormous cost and takes a great deal of time. We could move immediately to a broad assessment. Accountability would then be pinned on to local authorities.

If one revalues on a rolling basis or on an instant year basis, as happens in Scotland, householders become confused about accountability. They believe that it is the Government who have caused the increase in the value of their property, while the local authority gets the credit for lowering the poundage. However, local authorities never reduce it sufficiently to compensate people; generally they end up paying more. It is a purposeless exercise that does not solve the problem. People ought to know that they will pay less if they live in one type of house and that people with more money who live in much bigger houses will pay more.

The local council would adjust the boundaries. It is a rough and ready system, but if certain parts of a town improved while other declined, the onus would then be on the local authority to move properties into the relevant band, just as the onus would be on the local authority to change the poundage year on year and not to confuse it with revaluations. Once houses were put into categories A, B, C and D, that would be it. Each authority, whether in the south or the north, would put properties into those bands, regardless of what other authorities did, to raise the revenue they needed. That would be a straightforward system that could be introduced quickly.

The other remaining issue that my right hon. Friend must resolve is whether we take account of numbers and how that is to be done. We must state as clearly and quickly as possible that to take account, in broad terms, of the number of people who live in a house does not involve a twin-tax system. Whatever the Opposition may tell the public—that the Government intend to impose a poll tax on top of a property tax—we are not doing that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes you are."] I do not believe we are. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will say that that is not what we are going to do. If I allow them to speak for themselves, I must be allowed to speak for myself and to suggest that we could—I trust that the consultative documents will suggest a number of options—place the charge at a level that would be the equivalent of a couple. That charge would be halved if a single person were living in a particular property.

The press have suggested that the charge would be fixed on the assumption that three people were living in a house. That could be done, a reduction being made if only two people or one person lived in the house. I should not favour such an option, because the basic number in a household is two, not three. I do not think it is worth while trying to count the numbers in households with four, five or six people. Most households do not have more than three people.

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

This would be a rough and ready system which would end the abuse of the rating system—to which the Labour party would go back—under which a single person would pay the same as three or four wage earners in the house next door. It would take account of numbers in an approximate way.

If one wished to do more than that, one could impose on the owner of the house the duty to declare the numbers of people in his house, as he does for the electoral register. I would recommend to my colleagues, if they wanted to go that way, that it should be a scheme whereby the local authority would check the electoral register to see how many people were living in a house and the owner would then get the bill for two, three or four people. He or she would then decide whether to spread the burden. There are simple ways of doing that and it would not involve a separate bill for each person or keeping a separate register such as the poll tax register. There would be a single bill. It would not involve all the scrutiny, all the inspection and all the policing. I wish to goodness that we could nail this one and stop Opposition Members making nonsensical remarks about it.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): My hon. Friend just mentioned the community charge register. Does he support my contention that most of those in local authorities who have the duty of collecting local government taxes would agree with him that it is important that we do away with the concept of any separate register?

Dr. Hampson: Certainly. I totally endorse what my hon. Friend has said. I do not believe that I have seen any statement from Ministers that suggests that there is any intention of keeping a poll tax register in addition to the electoral register. I do not believe that that makes practical sense, and I trust that Ministers will not pursue that route.

Having outlined two possibilities of what we might do and suggested that, if we are to keep the percentage of central Government grant at its present level, we do so by moving and transferring services such as the bulk of education—we need not move it all, but we could certainly move 75 per cent. of it and go back to something like the system we had until 1957—we might have a balanced system that Opposition Members would feel they could support. I remind them that, when the present Leader of the Opposition was their education spokesman, he endorsed and advocated publicly on platform after platform that I was on that there should be a transfer of at least some education expenditure, so why can we not reach some compromise which Opposition Members would agree to endorse?

9.37 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Notwithstanding anything that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) or any of his right hon. and hon. Friends have said about the Bill, everyone in the country knows exactly what the Bill is about: it is about trying to save the Conservative Government, and it is borne out of fear and panic.

It was obvious from the very outset to Opposition Members, and to some of the more perceptive Conservative Members, that the poll tax would not work. It has taken a while, but gradually it has dawned on even the most stupid Conservative Members that the poll tax has become an electoral liability, and that is why they are moving so speedily to dump it. After all, nothing concentrates the minds of Members of Parliament more than the possibility of coming second or even third in their constituencies at a general election.

I am sorry that the previous Prime Minister is not in her accustomed place to listen to the debate. She viewed the poll tax as her flagship, but of course flagships are not designed to be hung around the neck. When studying the right hon. Lady's language it becomes politically interesting when for "flagship" one reads "millstone"; for "unassailable" one reads "on the way out"; for "jewel in our crown"—as the right hon. Lady referred to the GLC when it was won for the Conservative party—one reads "abolition"; and for "the iron lady" one reads "rusty old hulk now sitting in the political scrap yard waiting to be torn to pieces". I for one am no mourner as I watch that process.

Tory Members of Parliament knew that the poll tax had to go, albeit rather slowly. They would like to dump it in one day, but that is not possible. But even to dump it slowly, they had to dump the right hon. Member for Finchley rather more quickly. The poll tax represents bigotry and arrogance turned into legislation. Conservative Members went through the lobbies in support of the right hon. Member for Finchley, and now the vast majority of them are repenting.

One would expect some of them at least to have the humility to stand up and admit that they were wrong, and to apologise to local authorities and to the people, but arrogance still sits easily on them. I should like to know, indeed, whether the right hon. Member for Finchley will have the decency to apologise in this House. I suspect that she will not. In that case, she should be dragged here, nailed down to a bench and made to listen to the first ringing of the death-knell of her flagship.

I should like to know whether the right hon. Lady will vote tonight. I understand that the Government have imposed a three-line Whip. Will the right hon. Lady obey that Whip? Has she been paired?

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I shall not give way.

Has the right hon. Lady been paired? Perhaps she has been paired with the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)—who knows? They would make a very interesting couple. Or perhaps she has been paired with some other friend of the family. If she defies the three-line Whip, will she be admonished or denied her expected elevation to the upper House?

The poll tax has been a total fiasco.

Mr. Arnold *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I will not give way. Many hon. Members want to speak, yet Government Members have taken up ages with boring, tedious speeches. I want to get in and out as fast as possible. Let me give the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) a bit of advice: he should do likewise, both in his political life and in his private life.

The poll tax has been a fiddle from start to finish. Today again, the Secretary of State for the Environment was less than impressive. He asked who was paying for services in Wandsworth. Someone is paying. Surely it has dawned

even on Conservative Members of Parliament that there is no such thing as a free lunch. All that the Environment Secretary could say was that, if everyone were to vote the same way as people in Wandsworth, everyone would benefit in the same way. Let us take that to its logical conclusion. If every local authority went Tory, who would pay for the local government services? It appears that no one in Wandsworth is paying.

It is costing the taxpayers of this country about £14 billion to save the Government's face. The Government have reduced local authority finance to the level of low farce. If any local authority had been responsible for the financial chaos that the Government have visited upon the people, its members would have been surcharged. Indeed, some of them would have been disqualified for many years, as happened to many decent councillors in Liverpool, Lambeth and other places, who delayed making a rate only because they wanted to protect services. The Government have reduced local authority finance to a state of chaos, yet they are still walking around and expecting us to be grateful now that they are trying to clear up the mess that they created. This is hypocrisy raised to an art form.

As for the people who will benefit from this Bill, I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I shall be able to catch your eye when we are dealing with some of the amendments. Many people in my constituency will not benefit from this reduction of £140. Those who are paying only 20 per cent. will get only £28. They will have to spend only about £1,100 on VAT-rated services to pay all that money back, and they will continue to pay VAT after that. The last time VAT was increased, millions of retailers increased prices by amounts considerably greater than the tax increase. This is a bad deal for many thousands of people. It is certainly bad for the 41,000 in my borough who are on benefit. Those people will receive very little as a result of the Government's munificence. The Government are trying to buy off the taxpayers.

We have an incompetent, bungling, stupid, half-witted Government, who deserve to be kicked out of office as fast as possible. They have done vast damage, not only to local government finance but to the whole machinery of local democracy and accountability. They are a bunch of ratbags, and they deserve to be booted out.

9.44 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): The fundamental question which has lain behind this debate is whether we continue to want local government with the local democracy to which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) referred. I am one of those who believe in continuing to press forward with attempting to have a proper system of local democracy, and there are three possible approaches.

In ascending order of merit, they are, first, to fund local government nationally, as has been suggested by various hon. Members today, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) yesterday and by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell). I think that that would be a bad idea because, however clever one is with such a funding arrangement, there would have to be a predetermined formula which would essentially have to be based on local needs decided by the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North has come up with the suggestion of parcelling out money from the centre and leaving it to local government to choose how to spend the money, but the element of choice would be denied by a predetermined formula.

My one anxiety about the Bill—a point that was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North and others—is that it is a halfway point, a stepping stone, towards such a national form of local government funding. There are good reasons for worrying that this might be such a step.

On the one hand, the gearing point, which has been made several times, is that, once a position is reached where only 10 per cent. of local funding is discretionary, there is the problem that a 1 per cent. increase of expenditure on top of the existing formula would result in a 10 per cent. increase in the local discretionary funding. That would result in a situation which no Government, of whatever political persuasion, would be prepared to tolerate. This in turn would result in the perceived need for universal capping, and that would be tantamount to nationally run local government. For the sort of reason that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby put forward, there must be some anxiety that the Bill is a step in that direction, or might be in the wrong hands. That would be disturbing.

A second broad approach to local government was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), and that is to leave the proportion funded the same but to take away some of the services. There are some logical arguments in favour of that. That would leave genuine local services which one would hope would be funded locally with maximum local discretion and accountability and that would overcome some of the problems, which undoubtedly lie in the Government's mind, about the enormous size of some items of local funding such as education.

Thirdly, there is a set of suggestions which would involve genuine local accountability. The community charge was undoubtedly such a scheme. Inefficient councils, such as Lambeth, impose severe penalties upon the people who live in their area and those people have the power, which can be developed over the years, to throw out such a council and replace it with ones like that in Westminster, which will give them the benefit of a low community charge.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): One important point is constantly elided. My hon. Friend mentioned education in passing. Education is the most costly and important responsibility of local government; whatever decision is made about it should be made not on cost accounting grounds, but on the basis of whether that decision will promote or retard the improvement in quality that is imperative to the country's future.

I am sorry to sound so pompous, but this strikes me as rather important.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend has made a fair point. As he says, education is a predominant feature of local expenditure—so predominant, indeed, that it is surely reasonable to ask whether it is a genuinely local service that should be financed through a form of local taxation. I merely suggest that one way in which to preserve the balance between local funding—with genuine local accountability—and national funding, while lowering the overall bill, would be to remove education from the local budget.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Does my hon. Friend accept that many hon. Members, possibly on both sides of the House, sincerely believe that there are genuine educational grounds for making the transfer?

Mr. Spicer: Certainly I concede that; it is an important —perhaps predominant—factor.

There is a third way of funding local government: by maintaining the democratic local accountability that goes with a system that penalises inefficient authorities, and relates what people spend to the services that are provided. I have already expressed my anxieties about the Bill. I very much hope that it will prove to be a temporary measure to enable us to maintain the fundamental principle that local democracy can survive only if local government is allowed to raise its own money, while accepting the penalties that may be involved.

I cannot see how genuine local democracy and accountability could be maintained under an exclusively property-based tax, or under a system of national funding whereby local government became simply the agent of central Government. I hope that we can retain the fundamental principle that—unashamedly—formed part of the community charge proposals, and which I have defended in my constituency and elsewhere: the desirability of a relationship between what is spent locally and what is raised locally. I hope that the Bill represents no more than a breathing space, and that we shall keep faith with what we have done in the past—although, of course, we must develop and modify past measures for the future.

I should have preferred the money that we are spending in the Bill to be devoted to helping those who are most in need. That is a good Conservative principle, which we should have espoused by developing the rebate system. I trust that the Bill will provide us with no more than an interlude during which we can build on the principles that we have already established.

9.54 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) was commendably candid when he said that the Bill was intended to buy time on a purely political basis. No amount of time for this legislation can save the Conservative party. If only for his own sake, he should learn the lesson of what happened to his colleagues in Scotland at the previous general election, most of whom lost their seats precisely because of the poll tax.

I welcome the fact that the burden of the poll tax will be reduced as a consequence of the Bill. I even welcome the fact that the Government are beginning to redress the balance by increasing the subvention from central to local government to a proportion similar to that which existed when the Government first came to power. However, my constituents and I will not start rejoicing until the poll tax has been abolished. Whatever else the Bill may be, it is not quite the abolition of the poll tax.

The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) said yesterday that this would be "son of poll tax", but he was not quite right—it will be triplets. There will be a property tax, a poll tax—a substantial poll tax if the Secretary of State for Scotland has anything to do with it—and a value added tax surcharge to deal with the panic. In spite of the Bill, the poll tax will remain a substantial burden, even after the £140 reduction. My constituents who pay the full poll tax will still have to pay £402 as a consequence of the capricious way in which the Scottish Office distributes central Government grant among local authorities in Scotland. More important, the people on the lowest incomes in my constituency will still pay £80 towards the poll tax, which many of them cannot afford.

I vividly remember, when I received my first poll tax bill, bringing it to the House at Prime Minister's Question Time. I told the then Prime Minister that I should be £1,000 better off as a result of the poll tax, whereas the poorest people in my constituency would have to pay more. She told me that I should give my ill-gotten gains to charity, but that would not be of much assistance to the poorer people in my constituency or anywhere else.

The new formula will still mean that the poorer people will be required to pay substantially more than they can afford, partly to pay for the shortfall in local authority revenue caused by the chronic inefficiency of the poll tax, with which we have all become painfully familiar in recent months and years. It is absolutely vital that, whatever formula the Government try to devise to overcome the crisis that has befallen the poll tax, they must do the honest and fair thing for people on the lowest incomes. I understand that it would cost just £30 million to give those who qualify for the maximum rebate a 100 per cent. rebate in Scotland. That is the minimum that the Government should do to protect those people.

Ministers need not tell us that they were not warned —we told them what would happen. With my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), I was a member of the Committee which, in the winter of 1986-87, dealt with the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill. We warned the Government then that the poll tax would be unfair and unworkable. I remember especially contrasting what Her Majesty the Queen would pay in respect of Balmoral castle—a holiday or second home—with what a pensioner living in a cottage on that estate would pay. We now have the same thing again. The Queen will be £280 better off in respect of her second home at Balmoral, while a single pensioner living in a cottage on her estate will benefit by only £28.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will realise on recollection that he should not bring the royal family into his argument.

Mr. Home Robertson: We dealt with that issue in the debate at that time. I was referring to Her Majesty's private estate rather than to her official position, but I shall move on.

I remind the Secretary of State for Scotland how he and his colleagues scoffed and sneered, and exchanged reassurances about how it would be such a grand affair for the Tory party in Scotland to have the poll tax. The Secretary of State said:

"This is an issue which has been deliberated upon and considered and reviewed in all circumstances and from all angles for a very long time, and it is now appropriate to take decisions . . . What the Bill proposes is a workable and viable solution to the serious problem."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 13 January 1987; c. 144.]

I remind the Secretary of State that, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, when we discussed the Bill on the Scottish poll tax, he voted for the poll tax no fewer than 35 times. A number of his colleagues did the same, but they cannot do so again because most of them lost their seats at the ensuing general election. Those who lost their seats included the Minister in charge of that Bill, Mr. Michael Ancram, and the Whip, Mr. Gerald Malone, who

I understand is now in Winchester. Others who lost their seats included Mr. John Corrie, Mrs. Anna McCurley, Mr. Alexander Pollock, Mr. Barry Henderson and Mr. Michael Hirst. Even the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Albert McQuarrie, lost his seat. The only Tory survivors from that Committee were the hon. Members for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) and for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), and the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), now Secretary of State for Scotland. Yet we understand that they are still fighting to retain the principle of the poll tax. Will they never learn?

The Secretary of State still describes the poll tax as a "remarkable success story" and wants to ensure that the principle is retained in Scotland. I do not mind the Secretary of State and his dwindling band of hon. Friends from Scottish constituencies—11 down and 10 to go—behaving like political lemmings, but I do mind my constituents having to suffer as they do now under this grotesquely unfair tax, which bears no relationship to ability to pay or to access to services in different districts and regions in Scotland, and which takes no account of its chronic inefficiencies.

The Secretary of State for Scotland should face the fact that the poll tax is now in the process of self-destruction. It has been difficult enough for the poll tax to be administered up to now. Now that its death has been announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment, although he is trying to fudge the issue at the moment, what has up to now been a difficult tax to collect will become a non-starter. It will be like carrying on feeding the proverbial dead parrot.

What is required is not tinkering with the poll tax, and not palliatives like the Bill. What is required is the immediate abolition of the poll tax. The only way in which that can be done administratively—whatever the merits of the local income tax or anything else that hon. Members may wish to discuss may be—the only way to get rid of the poll tax this year is to reactivate the rating system and find ways of making it workable and acceptable. It may be worth considering other forms of taxation in due course, but we must face the fact that there is only one way to get rid of the poll tax now—to reintroduce a workable and fair property tax, and that is what we propose. The Government will not be able to get away with this shambles. I am glad that even the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) admitted that the Bill was only a palliative and a means of buying time, but it will not buy time—the poll tax must go.

10.3 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): We have seen some remarkable events. This morning, we learned that the Scottish National party has sacked its spokesman on the poll tax because he refuses to pay. The one point about the position of the Scottish National party that strikes me now is that, almost irrespective of what the Government produce, it will have to be backed by the Scottish National party—poll tax element and all. There are changes not only on the Opposition Benches. The Scottish Office has a new slogan. Its advice is not to pay the poll tax until the new arrangements are in place.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Gentleman answer a straight question? Now that nobody, not even Ministers, believes in the poll tax, will he, as shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, instruct Labour local authorities in Scotland to stop poinding the poor, as they are doing now, and to stop arresting benefits and stealing the goods of the sick, of the disabled and of the unemployed?

Mr. Dewar: I must confess that the hon. Gentleman's view of local democracy is strange if he thinks that it is my position to instruct those in local government. What is even more disreputable is that someone who has led people into a situation where debts have piled up so that they are no longer able to claim rebates, legal costs have accrued and they face great problems should then lecture me about the morality of the situation as he reaches for his cheque book and walks away from the problem.

If the Government's advice is that people should not pay and that we should all stop our direct debits until the new arrangements are in place, I suspect that the Secretary of State will find that the problems that that creates in terms of take-up in the next two years will be considerable.

There is always a temptation to rewrite history. In the recent statement on local government in Scotland on 21 March, the Secretary of State, when challenged about the liability of the severely mentally handicapped, suggested that the sympathetic approach that the Government had adopted to the community charge would perhaps put people's fears at rest. Those who remember the debate on Alzheimer's disease, our desperate efforts to persuade the Government to consider the problems of those suffering from that illness and the remarkable resistance of the Government to including them in the exemption scheme put up by the Secretary of State will find that charge somewhat unwise.

What about the mystery of the register? Ministers are all over the place on whether there will or will not be such a register. On Thursday, the Secretary of State for the Environment told hon. Members:

"under the new system we shall not need a register."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 422.]

By Sunday, on television, he was telling us that there may be a register. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for Scotland was telling anyone who listened that there would have to be some kind of register. On that form—it is just a symbol of the debate—it would be a surprise if the Government managed to agree on anything.

The relief scheme also constantly changes its form and substance. Transitional relief mark 1 has given way to mark 2, and now we have the community charge reduction scheme, which was altered yet again during last night's debate.

I accept that all the changes have been made in the cause of simplicity. Therefore, I was particularly interested when the Scottish Office offered a clear explanation today on how the new community charge reduction scheme will work. It offered the following formula:

"$\frac{E \times C - R - (E-1 \times £52)}{E}$",

where E is the number of persons in a household, C the poll tax level for 1991-92 and R the rates bill on the property as at 31 March 89. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) has suggested that it would be easy for anyone to adjust their poll tax liability under the new scheme, but if that formula is the kind of simplicity and light that the Government are pushing into the world of local government finance, we shall have many questions.

We are getting into an appallingly complicated and confused situation, not on the basis of any principle, but

[Mr. Dewar]

on the fatal basis that Ministers are trying to take a little bit here and a little bit there. Their actions will not produce something for the public good, but they hope that that will keep the warring factions in the Conservative party quiet for a little while longer. Warring factions there are in plenty. Many Conservative Members still look to Finchley as the Jacobites once looked to France.

Undoubtedly there are many Conservatives who are unhappy about what has been announced by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). In a recent article in the *Glasgow Herald*, the vice-president of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association, faced with the prospect of a two-tax system, said that that had all the attractions of being stranded on a desert island with Esther Rantzen. Whatever his personal judgment of Esther Rantzen, he has certainly expressed his view on the two-tax system.

I do not know what that gentleman will say about the three-tax system that the Secretary of State has now produced. My advisers tell me that the tabloid press has already described that as "Hezza's hat trick". I suspect that that proposal will be unsellable and will be seen for what it is—a pathetic attempt to buy time while the escape committee continues to meet in vain to find a way out of the difficulties in which the Government find themselves.

The Bill can only be described as a form of conscience money. We accept that any relief is welcome, but we have the most fundamental objections to many of the aspects and implications of what the Government are doing.

Again and again, speakers in this debate have said that it is not everyone who will get £140 off what they have to pay or, if they pay less than that amount, will see their bill totally eliminated. However, I suspect that that fact has not been appreciated by many people. In Scotland, 800,000 people are dependent upon income support. All of them will get a maximum of £28. They are sitting at home thinking about £140, and they are going to be very bitter and disappointed.

I was very interested in what the Secretary of State for the Environment said tonight about the reduction in the headline figures. I noticed, as I am sure he has noticed, that the differential—the reduction—in England is much larger than it will be in Scotland. Considering the minutiae and how the system will impact, we are left with considerable anxieties, and with the feeling that we have been the victims of a con trick.

My constituents will certainly notice the anomaly of Wandsworth and Westminster. They do not see a triumph of accountability in that. They do not see the sacred principle that buttressed the poll tax for so long—the principle that everyone must pay something. It is really no answer for the Secretary of State to say that people should get their local authorities to reduce their charges and also their budgets. Are we going to sack home helps in hard-pressed areas of urban deprivation? Are we going to close schools? Is that the advice of the Secretary of State, who once paraded up and down the length of England, posing as the champion of deprived urban areas? Is that the advice that he is now giving?

I can only talk with detailed knowledge of the Scottish system, but that shows that there is little correlation between the size of the poll tax in the current year and grant payments made or expenditure. For example, in Lothian, which is a major local authority in Scotland, the poll tax is nearly the same as the notorious figure in Lambeth that we have heard so much about. However, Lothian's grant per head from the Scottish Office is the lowest of any region in Scotland, and it spends less per head than the regional average. That puts into perspective some of the simplistic deductions—I regret to say that they were almost sneers—about local government during this debate, sometimes from ministerial sources.

Later tonight, we shall consider amendments. I very much hope that the 20 per cent. rule will be abolished. Again and again, we have tried to convince the Government that it should go, but we have always been met with the argument that it had to be retained because of the principle of accountability, that sacred principle that everyone pays something—except, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said, in Wandsworth.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will recognise the seriousness of the argument that, if one transfers a large tranche of local government expenditure to VAT, which has been picked as the most invisible of taxes for political reasons, if one proposes a scheme in which the only legal liability will fall upon the householder and no legal liability will fall upon other people who generate liability but are not responsible for it, which I should have thought was the anthithesis of accountability, it is clear that the system of accountability has gone, and with it goes the only possible reason for retaining the 20 per cent. rule.

In Scotland, that rule could go for £30 million. That sounds like a lot of money, but it is dwarfed by the waste and appalling inefficiency which has been forced upon us by the mismanagement of the Government and the inefficiency of the system.

I hope that we shall not get a stony-faced refusal to consider this matter. May I offer some helpful advice? it would greatly help the Government's credibility if they gave ground on this, as they have given ground and scuttled on so many other things after the past three or four weeks.

I finish by returning to a theme of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). The situation in Scotland parallels the one to which he referred in connection with the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). Over a considerable period, the Secretary of State for Scotland has taken a stringent approach to local government finance. We have had a ruthless series of cuts —a withdrawal—*[Interruption.]* It may not be ruthless by the standards of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), but it is ruthless by the standards of any reasonable or ordinary human being. The Secretary of State for Scotland has appeared as a Scrooge-like figure of probity, with the hanging face of an unsympathetic bank manager refusing an overdraft, when saying that any increase in local government spending or in central Government support for local services was anathema.

The kernel of my concern and worries is not the spirit in which the Government have approached the problem. Of course I should have liked to see a retreat and the acceptance that central Government have to make a due contribution and to maintain a proper balance in the funding of local services, but I suspect that this is the start of a process that will leave local democracy with a sterile future. We are starting a process that will mean that there

will indeed be a huge percentage of central Government funding, but which will produce an impossible gearing effect.

In Scotland at the moment, only 13 per cent. of local government finance is raised by local government itself and is controlled by local government. The result of that huge percentage dependence on central government support will be low expenditure and deteriorating services, and that is a tragedy. The price of the increase announced in the Budget will be a straitjacket on local government and its most stringent capping by the Secretary of State for the Environment in the years ahead.

There was an interesting exchange the other day at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, at which the Secretary of State for Scotland spoke. I listened with care to his speech—as I always do—because on occasions his speeches throw up some interesting ideas. He equated control with accountability, which is a dangerous fallacy. It is not true that control and accountability are the same thing. In many ways, they are very different.

Central Government control is now being substituted for accountability, and in that we see the essence of the death of local government. That will be seen with great sorrow in many areas of England, where local authorities have been supported by Tory councillors who have worked honourably to control the affairs of their own communities and to run them in accordance with the opinions of their electorate.

If I am right, if that is the process on which we have started, and if the Bill is part of that process, every hon. Member who has an interest in local democracy and in the right of communities to run their own affairs will have every cause for concern.

10.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): There have been some interesting speeches in this debate. I thank particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) for their support. I thank also my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) for his interesting contribution to the on-going review that we shall be pursuing into other aspects of local government funding, and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer).

This is a small Bill, but it is important—not only for local authorities and for local government in general, but also as part of the broad approach to the reform of the funding, function and structure of local government that we are bringing forward in a measured and orderly way. It is most immediately and directly important because it brings an immediate benefit to the residents of local authorities throughout the country. There is no doubt about the reason and need for the Bill—it is the high spending of local councils.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) tried to pretend that aggregate Exchequer finance for local authorities had been cut and that only this Government have cut it as a proportion of expenditure. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment pointed out, cuts in aggregate Exchequer finance started from 1976 onwards under the last Labour Government. In Scotland in 1975-76, the figure was as high as 75 per cent. of local government expenditure. By the time we came to power, it had been cut by the Labour Government to 68·5 per cent. Certainly we have reduced it further, but the grant has gone up by 6 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

The problem is that the overall level of the local tax burden is too high. That is what we had to address in the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford pointed out. The reason is that local authorities have continued to increase their spending year after year over and above the rate of inflation.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister is presenting a somewhat distorted picture. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) told us earlier in the debate that it was clear from an answer that he had received to a parliamentary question that, if the rate support grant had been maintained at the same level from 1978-79, the poll tax would be not £250 but £150.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is ignoring the fact, that while local government funding in Scotland has risen by 6 per cent. in real terms, the increase in spending by local authorities has risen faster and that has caused the burden on local people. In Fife, for instance, in the five years before the community charge was introduced, expenditure rose by no less than 40 per cent. in real terms.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) blamed the high poll tax levels in Edinburgh and East Lothian on the grant distribution, but that is absolute nonsense. In fact, the opposite is the case. Lothian got a higher than average increase in Government grant this year. In Edinburgh, spending has risen by no less than 70 per cent. since 1984, and staffing is up by 30 per cent.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Is it not a disgrace that Labour-controlled Fife regional council gets the Douglas Mason accolade from the architect of the poll tax, by showing clearly that, if everybody behaved like that council, the poll tax would be working?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman may wish to fight his private battles with others in Fife on the Floor of the House. The one contribution that we would welcome from the Scottish National party would be an apology to the people of Scotland whom it has led into severe difficulties through its non-payment campaign. The sympathy evinced by the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends for the poor in Scotland is the most sickening hypocrisy against the background of having led those people into misery and debt through the non-payment campaign.

Under the community charge, local authorities had their chance to behave responsibly and to show themselves accountable to local residents. Now, for the sake of the community charge payer, we have had to recognise that the local tax base can no longer sustain the burden that councils have been imposing upon it. That is why we have moved to increase funding from central Government and the United Kingdom taxpayer. With that comes more accountability to the taxpayer.

I confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that this is a long-term step change in the central-local taxation relationship. If local authorities find themselves under tighter control in future because of accountability to the national taxpayer being more rigorous than accountability to local residents, they can reflect on the fact that they had their chance to be more responsible in their approach.

[Mr. Lang]

I am fully aware that the provisions of the Bill require local authorities to undertake important additional administrative tasks. We are trying hard to keep disruption to a minimum. To the hon. Member for Dagenham I can say that the £60 million estimate of additional administrative cost to local authorities is just that. It is not intended to compensate authorities for lost cash flow because advance payments from the non-domestic rate pool in England and advance payments from the rate support grant in Scotland will do that. On the figures for re-billing given by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), it sounds as though the provision of £60 million is generous.

Our intention is that the Bill should be implemented as quickly as possible. We shall give maximum co-operation to local authorities. There are signs that many local authorities can re-bill quickly. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford that it would be unforgiveable if local authorities delayed their bills and held them back from the electorate until after the local elections in order to hide the good news.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston) *rose*——

Mr. Lang: No, the hon. Gentleman was not present during the debate.

Mr. Dewar: I am a little worried about these allegations. As the senior Minister in Scotland, does the Secretary of State suggest that Labour authorities, or any local authority, would deliberately hold back issuing the bills, thereby putting themselves in much greater difficulty with their cash flow, in order to make the political point that appears to lie behind the Secretary of State's suggestion?

Mr. Lang: I was responding to a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford. I hope that the hon. Member for Glasgow. Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) agrees that it would be unforgivable if local authorities delayed in that way.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) suggested that the arrangements in the Bill favoured standard charge payers over those in receipt of community charge benefit. We are applying a consistent principle. That principle is that the personal charge set by an authority will be reduced by £140. Where a charge payer pays the full charge, the amount that he pays will be reduced by £140. Where the charge payer pays only a proportion of the charge, the amount will be reduced by a proportion of the £140. So a student paying 20 per cent. of the charge would have his bill reduced by 20 per cent. of £140—that is to say, by £28.

Likewise, where the standard charge is half the full charge, as in several cases, the bill will be reduced by half of £140—that is to say, by £70. Where the standard charge is twice the full personal charge, the reduction will be twice £140. That is not favouritism but a sensible application of a uniform approach. The hon. Member for Eastbourne cannot find fault with that.

It is essential that the measure should not be regarded simply as a means of reducing charges for the coming year. It should instead be viewed in the much wider context of our review of the future funding of local government. The Bill provides for the initial implementation of a permanent change in the balance of the funding of local services from local taxation to national taxation. In future, the balance will remain broadly the same as it will be following the enactment of the Bill. The future, of course, includes the new arrangements for funding local government expenditure which I and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales announced last week.

The Opposition have sought to characterise our approach as indecisive, yet in the next breath they complain about the unseemly haste that they see in the Bill. In the devil's dictionary and distorting glossary of Labourspeak, careful consideration becomes indecision, decisive action equals panic, sensible consultation equals dithering, and co-ordinated progress is described as chaos.

I will give the House an example of Labour's decisive action. The Labour party's roof tax was drafted in two minutes on the back of an envelope and lasted about five minutes. An example of Labour's careful consideration is the more than 67 varieties of local tax that they have come up with in the past few years. They make H. J. Heinz look like a one-product company. The trouble is that the 67 announcements came first and the careful consideration came later.

The roof tax was described by the hon. Member for Garscadden in February 1990 as

"a sound, detailed and practical proposal",

and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) in March said:

"The principle is firm and I cannot see us moving from it."

But the Leader of the Opposition said the next month that he did not think that there was too much enthusiasm for the idea. So with the rates, which the Leader of the Opposition described as the most unjust of all taxes, while his deputy, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) declared that the basis of local government finance must be the rating system. Then the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) described the rates as an irrational and highly resented form of taxation. Now we have the hon. Member for Dagenham taking us back to the rates. I do not know how the House would describe that, but I would describe it as dithering—dithering to the extent of chaos.

Whatever the background of the present position, at the next election the electorate will have a choice. Electors will be able to choose our new low-level local tax or go back to the rates with Labour. I have no doubt which the people will choose. Our proposals are neither ill considered nor confused. They are part of a well thought out, co-ordinated approach. We seek consultation on some aspects in order to achieve broad agreement on a durable solution that will be accepted as fair.

We are considering local government in the round—its function and structure, as well as its funding—and we shall introduce our first proposal in a measured and orderly way.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman was good enough to consider our valuation base and suggested that it was unsatisfactory. Will he confirm that, under his scheme, there will be a property tax which will involve a valuation tax on each individual property, and that there will be regular revaluations in the system? Has he ruled out capital valuations?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will have to contain his impatience until we publish our consultation document.

Today we are debating the Bill. It embodies the first and key component of our plans as well as forming part of the Chancellor's Budget strategy. Its vital contribution is to reduce charge levels to a tolerable level from the inflated levels to which they have been raised by the profligacy of so many high spending councils, feckless in their disregard for the burden that they placed on local residents.

Mr. Nellist: Will the right hon. Gentleman deal with a point that I put in my speech? What is the Government's position in relation to the 18·5 million people whom the Prime Minister has identified as being seriously in arrears on this year's poll tax? I am thinking of the family in Coventry to whom I spoke on the telephone tonight, who have been charged £19 for the 19 days of this financial year for which the mother of the family lived. Do the Government intend to continue with prosecutions in the courts?

Mr. Lang: The Bill is concerned with the year 1991-92 and not with earlier years.

Labour councils may not care about the burden that has been imposed on local residents, but we do. That is why the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have acted firmly and decisively. I urge the House not to dither but to give a swift passage to the Bill and bring early relief to every community charge payer in the land and then, in a calmer atmosphere, to proceed towards the establishment of a better arrangement for the funding of local government in this country.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Committee of the whole House, pursuant to the Order this day.

Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[SIR PAUL DEAN *in the Chair.*]

Clause 1

STATUTORY REDUCTION OF COMMUNITY CHARGES: ENGLAND AND WALES

10.37 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 1, line 5, at beginning insert—

'Subject to subsection (1A) below and to the making of an Order under this section:'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): I suggest that it would be for the convenience of the Committee to consider at the same time the following amendments: No. 16, in page 1, line 8, after 'of', insert 'an Order made under'.

No. 25, in clause 3, page 3, line 14, at beginning insert—

'Subject to subsection (1A) below and to the making of an Order under this section.'.

No. 29, in clause 3, page 3, line 16, after 'of', insert 'an Order made under'.

No. 47, in clause 1, page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State shall, where he makes an Order under this section to give effect to the reductions specified in subsection (1) above, within one month thereafter issue guidance to charging authorities as to preparatory steps which may be appropriate with respect to—

(a) any proposals he may consider appropriate concerning the level of local taxation in the financial year commencing on 1st April 1992; and

(b) proposals concerning the possible introduction from that date of any new system of local taxation.

(1B) No guidance shall be issued under subsection (1A) above before the completion by the Secretary of State of consultation with such persons representative of local authorities in England and Wales as appear to him to be concerned.'.

No. 48, in clause 1, page 2, line 6, at end insert—

'(8) Subject to subsections (1A) and ((1B) above, the Secretary of State may by Order give effect to the provisions of subsection (1) above.'.

No. 49, in clause 3, page 3, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State shall, where he makes an Order under this section to give effect to the reductions specified in subsection (1) above, within one month thereafter issue guidance to local authorities as to preparatory steps which may be appropriate with respect to—

(a) any proposals he may consider appropriate concerning the level of local taxation in the financial year commencing on 1st April 1992; and

(b) proposals concerning the possible introduction from that date of any new system of local taxation.

(1B) No guidance shall be issued under subsection (1A) above before the completion by the Secretary of State of consultation with such persons representative of local authorities in Scotland as appear to him to be concerned.'.

No. 50, in clause 3, page 4, line 15, at end insert—

'(9) Subject to subsections (1A) and (1B) above, the Secretary of State may by Order give effect to the provisions of subsection (1) above.'.

Mr. O'Brien: This group of amendments refers in the main to orders that the Secretary of State will make to ensure that the future financing of local government is sound and fair to those who contribute to local government services and to local authorities which administer those services.

Everybody who works and serves in local government is fed up with the constant changes that have been made to local government taxation in the past 12 years, but more so in the past three years in Scotland and in the past two years in England and Wales. As the Prime Minister and Secretary of State now agree, the poll tax is not acceptable, will not work and is costly to administer and collect. Tonight, we are arguing that it should be abolished. We also want son of poll tax to be abolished.

Clause 1 deals with the statutory reduction in the poll tax for England and Wales. Amendment No. 12 urges the Secretary of State, when making an order under clause 1, to take into consideration the matters detailed in the other amendments in this group. Whether clause 1 reduces the poll tax for all poll tax payers or just a few, as now appears to be the case, we want amendment No. 47 to be given serious consideration.

Amendment No. 12 provides that, before any action is taken, the amendment should come into serious play because the Secretary of State should issue guidance on what he is preparing, what the level will be and the sort of taxation there will be to finance local services for local government in the year commencing 1 April 1992.

I have two significant questions to put to the Secretary of State about any commitment to abolish the community charge. First, does the new local tax embody any elements of a poll tax? We were told by the Secretary of State on 21 March that the new local tax will comprise

"a single bill for each houshold comprising two essential elements, the number of adults living there and the value of the property."

Those, we are told, will be the two essential elements included in any future local government tax bill. In response to a question asked by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—who advocates the retention of the poll tax—the Secretary of State said that the new tax

"combines many of the elements of my right hon. Friend's ideas".

My second question to the Secretary of State relates to timing. When will the new local tax be in place? Amendment No. 47 seeks information about any proposals involving the new system of taxation. What will it entail? Is there to be a register of people who will have to pay the poll tax? The Secretary of State said:

"It is perfectly possible that we shall not need a register".

He also said:

"I have already said that it is possible in the new arrangements that a register of the sort associated with the community charge will not be necessary. It is a detailed and technical matter that must be looked at. We shall be putting forward in the consultation document a number of options—they are not firm proposals now—to deal with the matter because it is important, as I have said several times, that the local authorities become involved at this stage in advising on the most effective way forward."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 404, 408, 409, 415.]

Ministers have said that that is right. May I have an assurance that there will be no register?

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Since the Labour party's proposal is to return to the rates, does not the hon. Gentleman accept that there was one basic problem—the rates did not distinguish between the single person and the multi-occupancy of a household? Does he not welcome, therefore, the idea of a consultation

document that might consider the various ways in which a distinction could be made between what those different households pay?

Mr. O'Brien: The rebate scheme sought to distinguish between the single householder and the family, but that scheme was dismantled by the Government. We propose a favourable rebates scheme that will meet the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). If the hon. Gentleman cares to sit through the debate on the next group of amendments, he will hear our precise proposals on the issue that he raised.

Will there be a register? The Minister's silence shows that there will be a register, as there is at present. As we know, that register is totally unworkable. How will the local tax compare with the poll tax before and after the poll tax surcharge on VAT has been levied, and how will it square with the principle enuniciated by the Secretary of State to underpin any form of local tax? The Government will have to answer those questions if we or local government are to have any confidence in the Bill.

In fairness to local government and to poll tax payers, any guidance should be issued within a month of any order, and poll tax payers or ratepayers, whatever the classification, should be afforded fairness in any orders that are made. Our experience of the poll tax legislation over the past three years is that it is unfair. Will the new tax be fair? As we have said, if there had been more time to prepare and more consultation with interested bodies, the flat rate reduction of £140 per poll tax payer could have been applied more fairly. Rebates could have been increased or the 20 per cent. contribution by people on income support could have been abolished. Poll tax could have been reduced proportionately so that some authorities could have levied a low poll tax or none at all. If time had been allowed for consultation, the distribution of the £4·5 billion could have been much fairer.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman speaks about fairness. For the education of the Committee, could he give us the comparison between the current community charge levels in, for example, Barking, Dagenham and Ealing and the level of local government contribution that householders in a two-bedroomed house in those places would pay under the system proposed by Labour?

Mr. O'Brien: I have no objection to making comparisons, but if the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues want to make them, they should tell us how many people in Barking or Dagenham will receive the £140 rebate.

Mr. Tracey: Answer my question.

Mr. O'Brien: If we are to have comparisons, let us have some figures from the Government, who are proposing the Bill. As the Secretary of State has made it clear that he is not happy with the poll tax, can we assume that he will endeavour to abolish any proposals in the Bill that resemble a poll tax?

10.45 pm

I have here the report of an interview with the Secretary of State in *The Times* of 10 May last year, at the start of his leadership campaign. In it, he said of the poll tax:

"In many of the marginal constituencies by which the tenure of power is determined . . . is a belief that it is either too high, unfair or both, and it has created a lingering sense of injustice. I have never known so large a postbag—from those with a life-long commitment to the Tory cause who, having bought their homes, saved to ensure their independence and budgeted carefully for their old age, feel badly let down."

Last May, the Secretary of State was telling everybody that the Tory party had let down its supporters because of the introduction of the poll tax. If he believes in what he said then, he should put that belief into practice and make sure that there is no element of poll tax in the Bill.

The uncertainty of the Government's proposals for local government finance has led members of the Tory party, both inside and outside the House, to suggest all kinds of formulae to ease the pain and problems through which their party is going. Some hon. Members say that there should be a higher VAT charge, some say that we should abolish local tax, some say that we should take some services from local government, including education and the police and fire services. Because of this uncertainty, local authorities will need sufficient time to make the necessary changes if the poll tax is abolished. The Labour party is committed to abolishing the poll tax. We intend to fulfil that commitment.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): The issue before the Committee is one of the most simple that we can debate—whether we should take £140 off the headline community charge of each and every person in the country. The Labour party apparently agrees with the Government on that proposition, because it did not oppose Second Reading.

The second issue before the House is whether the balance of taxation should be as proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget. The Government have made it clear that they believe that the new balance which is established by the Bill, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, should be the balance not only for this year but for future years. On this item as well, I believe that the Labour party agrees with the Government.

I believe that for two reasons: first, the Opposition did not oppose the Second Reading; secondly, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that he wishes the proportion in future to be about 20 per cent. That implies a slightly higher level of local taxation funding than is brought about by the Bill, but for the moment I shall let that pass; let us say that we are in the same ball park. Again it appears that there is no matter of principle between the two sides. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Dagenham would stop squeaking, "Let's get to the amendment." I am filling the background before dealing with the amendment. My remarks will be seen to be perfectly germane.

Mr. Gould: I simply observed that, if the Minister of State had wanted to speak in the Second Reading debate, he had every opportunity to do so, but as this is not a Second Reading debate, I invite him, through you, Sir Paul, to concentrate on the amendment so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien).

Mr. Portillo: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Perhaps I can now get on with my speech.

The reason for setting out the principles on which the Bill is based—and the principles upon which, apparently, the two parties are agreed—is that, having said that it is in favour of these principles and having failed to oppose the Second Reading, the Labour party now wishes to set up in

[Mr. Portillo]

the first amendment a series of obstacles to providing people with the £140 reduction in their community charges. Having avoided any public obloquy by opposing the Second Reading—recognising, as it did, that if it had opposed the £140 reduction, the British public would have been extremely angry—in this first amendment the Labour party now tries to make it difficult to make those £140 payments. By indirect means, the Opposition wish, if not to deny people a reduction in their community charge, at least to make it very difficult for that reduction to be made and to delay its delivery. I trust that I am now dealing with the amendment to the satisfaction of the hon. Member for Dagenham.

Mr. Gould *indicated assent.*

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister not feel that those on income support who will continue to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge should have a share in the £4·5 billion? That is the point of the amendment.

Mr. Portillo: They will have a proportionate share of the £4·5 billion. They will get 20 per cent. of the £140, just as they are asked to pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge. Furthermore, since the hon. Member for Dagenham is so keen that I should stick to the amendment, I ought to point out that a number of other amendments deal more directly with that question. My hon. Friends and I will be pleased to deal with them.

The amendment seeks to introduce into the Bill a series of irrelevancies that have nothing to do with giving people a £140 reduction in their community charge in the coming year. That series of irrelevancies has nothing to do with changing the balance between what is raised in local taxation and what is raised in national taxation. The hon. Member for Normanton asked many questions about the future form of the local tax that we shall introduce. I do not intend to go over my right hon. Friend's statement. It was made only last Thursday. It is as clear as crystal, and it is in everybody's mind. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the review that the Government are conducting was always foreseen as being in phases. So far the phases have been as follows.

We made some changes to the community charge reduction scheme, which benefited millions of people. In the Budget, we announced a reduction in the community charge of £140, the headline figure. Last Thursday, we made a statement on finance, structure and functions. That process will be followed by consultations during the summer, to be followed by legislation, which I expect will be introduced in the autumn. That is a clear series of stages in the review.

At one point, the hon. Gentleman asked me to give him guidance—I do not know whether that was a slip of the tongue—on what the level of taxation would be on 1 April 1992. I have no difficulty in answering that question. The level of taxation will be as it is today. The balance between local taxation and national taxation will be as has been set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the form of taxation in place on 1 April 1992 will be the community charge. We have made it clear that we hope to be able to introduce the local tax by 1 April 1993.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Can the Minister tell us what the Chancellor meant when he suggested yesterday that, in the coming year, the VAT increase would not raise sufficient funds to cover the allocation that is now being made? I refer the Minister to column 700 of the *Official Report*. What taxes was the Chancellor referring to when he suggested that other increases were necessary to achieve the Government's goals?

Mr. Portillo: I do not have column 700 of *Hansard* at hand, but I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in summing up yesterday, said that the VAT increase and the Government's objective of reducing the average amount actually paid in community charge to a figure below £175 would enable us to make further changes in the community charge reduction scheme, to which I referred later yesterday in the debate on the money resolution relating to this Bill.

The matters with which this amendment deals are irrelevancies. There is absolutely no need to delay the introduction of the reduction of £140 while the Labour party seeks further clarification of our proposals. Those proposals will be clarified fairly shortly, in line with the timetable that I set out this evening, which confirmed the timetable that the Government had set out earlier. I urge Labour Members that it is not in their interests to display to the British public that their objective is to put hurdles in the way of the introduction of the reduction of £140 in the headline figure of community charge. Certainly my hon. Friends take the view that we should implement the reduction as soon as possible, and therefore that the amendment should not be accepted.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I shall be very brief.

It seems that the Minister has got himself into a bad mood at the start of these proceedings. I do not know why he should resent the expenditure of a little time to ensure that this Bill will achieve its stated purpose. We have got past the Second Reading. I do not now why the Minister even expected anyone to vote against the Bill, or even to delay the proceedings unnecessarily. Indeed, I suggested to him that the guillotine was unnecessary. The evidence that that contention was right seems to be mounting. The Minister is indeed a little out of sorts.

We have been told that the purpose of the Bill is to achieve a reduction of £140 in the headline poll tax level for every charge payer in the country. That was quite specific, but it does not appear to be what the Bill achieves. Substantial numbers of people will not have their poll tax bills reduced by £140 from the headline level.

I do not know why the Minister wants to cause this confusion. He can tell us why, in his view, it would not be appropriate to give additional relief to those who are already benefiting from the transitional relief scheme and the extension of that scheme that has been announced. It would be perfectly proper for him to rest on that case, but what good is served by leading a great many people to expect a greater reduction than they will actually get?

Ministers have been through this once already. A previous Secretary of State announced at his party conference that nobody would have to pay more than a certain amount above the previous rates, but all the complications were left out. Lots of people suddenly found that that did not apply to them. It applied only on the basis

of the Government's definition of the charge—not on the basis of the charges set by local authorities, almost all of which, whatever the political party in power, were higher. If people had moved house, and for all sorts of other reasons it did not apply.

There is no benefit to anybody in pretending that the Bill does other than what it actually does. Let the Minister advance his case about the precise level of relief, and not pretend that people will get reductions that they will not get. Otherwise, there will be enormous disappointment and great irritation, and the disfavour that the Government already suffer will be increased. These proceedings could be advanced more quickly and more successfully if people stopped making grand and exaggerated claims.

If the Minister agrees to do that, I shall be happy not to make any more grand claims about local income tax for most of the night, because the case for it is clearly made out.

11pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The key amendment is No. 47, which deals with the arrangements for moving towards 1992. I tabled amendments Nos. 51 and 52 in an attempt to tackle the problem. The Bill applies only to the coming year and does nothing about the position after that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) expressed great concern about registration. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Scotland have given different answers on the subject. In reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), the Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"It is perfectly possible that we shall not need a register to administer the tax."

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), he said:

"No one has raised this issue as a problem in the course of designing it. No one has raised it with me as a problem in moving from the community charge to the local tax, so I have no reason to suppose that there is any problem that I must account for."

Now it is a matter of ignorance. The issue has not been brought to the Secretary of State's attention, so he has not thought about it. It is not that there is to be no register.

The matter would have been considered if the Secretary of State for the Environment had accepted my offer in January to discuss the impact of registration. Two months later, I received a letter from the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) saying that there was no time to pursue that matter. Yet the impact of the poll tax on the electoral register is of considerable concern. Some 600,000 people are missing from the electoral register compared with last year and taking into account the number of people over 18 years old in the population. Interestingly, the Government refuse to answer questions about the number of people on current electoral registers, which would allow us to judge whether the poll tax has resulted in an improvement or a worsening of that trend.

The Secretary of State for the Environment than told me:

"under the new system we shall not need a register. I have made that clear. Answers to such questions will be clear in the consultation document."

Yet the Secretary of State for Scotland told my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald):

"Clearly, there will have to be some kind of register, as there is with any kind of local tax."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 409-22, 474.]

We need to know whether there is to be a register. The existence of such a register is of considerable importance. If the electoral register is to be used, the system envisaged will be a direct tax upon the franchise. If another form of register is to be used, such as the one that we have experienced, it will be an indirect tax upon the franchise and will have an equally serious effect.

Every hon. Member should be concerned to protect the existence of the franchise. The House should pride itself on having extended the franchise until this Government came along and implemented the poll tax. I hope that the issue of the register will be taken into account.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Census (Confidentiality) Bill was designed to reassure people that there was no link between the collection of the 10-yearly census information and the compilation of a poll tax register, which many people felt would prejudice the accurate collection of information on the census? Will he further confirm that the Government will not protect the electoral register in the same way, because they have probably worked out that the bulk of the 600,000 who have disappeared from the electoral register were hardly likely to have voted Tory in the first place? Therefore, the Government are trying to fiddle the franchise in order to fiddle the next election result.

Mr. Barnes: It would be serious enough if 600,000 people were missing randomly, across the political spectrum: everyone should have the right to exercise the franchise. But for 600,000 people whose views point in a particular direction to be missing is ghastly—especially given the present first-past-the-post electoral system, which means that the impact need only be felt in a number of marginal seats for a fantastic general election result to follow.

We should feel deeply concerned about the fixing and fiddling of general election results. The Census (Confidentiality) Bill recognised the problem, but if the register is not to disappear altogether, we shall need an Electoral Registration (Confidentiality) Bill to protect it from the effects of poll tax registration.

This is probably the most serious impact on democracy that the poll tax has had. Its knock-on consequences have hit the very foundations of the British constitution. Constitutional lawyers would surely consider electoral registration not just another statute, but one of the key statutes that are equivalent in this country to a written constitution.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I think that the Minister was joking when he said that Opposition Members were not concerned about the £140 that would be taken off poll tax bills. Let me tell him that many people would be grateful if just a few pounds were taken off their bills, because of the misery that they are now experiencing. With a little more thought, that £140 could have been targeted much more appropriately—it could have gone where it is really needed. It is not too late for the Minister to act. His concern for the Labour party is very touching, but I can tell him now that the country is ready to judge him. If his performance on "Newsnight" is anything to go by, I do not rate his chances of re-election very highly—he really got his come-uppance there.

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

Amendment No. 47 is a probing amendment. We want to know the Government's plans for future taxation. We are saying, "Please tell us that you are going to abolish the poll tax—although no Opposition Member thinks that you will, given the deep divisions within your party." There is a split from top to bottom of the Conservative party, with the Secretary of State wanting a property tax and half the rest of the party wanting a poll tax.

As my hon. Friends have said repeatedly this evening, we have ended up with a three-tax system. The Minister has a duty to tell us what he is going to do. We need to know about future taxation, given what the Chancellor has done with VAT. As has also been said repeatedly this evening, people in receipt of income support will benefit very little from the £140 rebate, but will pay much more VAT on what they buy. They will receive 54p a week from this giveaway, which in practical terms is no more than a bribe to enable the Conservatives to win the next election. *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady is entitled to be heard.

Mrs. Mahon: If people spend £22 on goods that are liable to VAT, they become losers. It is easy to do that. I obtained a list from the Library of items liable to VAT. It included fruit juice, sweets, hot takeaway food, fish and chips, hamburgers, telephones, biscuits and toilet items, which people use every day. Once a child reaches 13 or 14, he goes into adult clothes, which are liable to VAT. It is important that we know about these matters.

The Minister and the Secretary of State cannot get away with going on about Wandsworth and Westminster. People in Halifax will want to know why they have to pay extra on a pint of beer so that the rich fat cats of Westminster and Wandsworth can get their services for nothing. Clearly it is not fair. Will the Minister tell us why he thinks that it is a fair tax?

The Minister must also tell us when he will abolish the poll tax. We all know that he will not abolish the tax, but we must keep pushing and probing. We must say to him, "Take that silly grin off your face. You have lost heavily and you will lose the next election heavily. Start giving some truthful answers at the Dispatch Box." The Minister has wasted billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on the foolish ideological flagship of the previous Prime Minister and her Government. If Ministers were councillors, they would be surcharged out of existence. It is a disgrace.

Every time I think about the wasted £14 billion, I think about hospitals that have shut, wards that have closed and schools that are scrimping and saving. I visited a school in my constituency last Friday which had classrooms propped up with steel bars. Every time I think about the £14 billion, I think about what we could have been spending on services. For the Minister to stand at the Dispatch Box with the arrogance that is symptomatic of Conservative Ministers and pretend that it does not matter and that the Opposition are playing games is disgraceful. Let him get on his feet and tell us now what he intends to do about the poll tax.

Mr. O'Brien: I wish to reiterate what I said earlier. There are two significant questions that I will put to the Minister. First, is there to be a poll tax element in the new tax system? We have been told that the new tax system will comprise two significant elements—the number of adults living in the household and the value of the property. Will the Minister confirm that the tax will include a poll tax element, or will he deny that? Secondly, I asked whether we could be told when the new local tax would be in place. Many people inside and outside the House want to know when the changes will be made.

I raised the point about a fairer distribution of the £4·5 billion. If there had been more time available and consultation with interested bodies and organisations, I am sure that there would have been a fairer distribution through abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution to be paid by people on income support. There could be a greater review of the issue of whether poorer people who have to pay the poll tax could be given a greater rebate. Those matters will be discussed later. We want answers on those issues. I ask the Minister to address just two points: will there be a poll tax element, and when will the new tax system be put into place?

11.15 pm

Mr. Portillo: Although I spoke for only about five minutes at the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) accused me of being out of sorts, while the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) accused me of joking and having a silly grin on my face. I do not believe that those descriptions are consistent.

I have already dealt with the questions that the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) has just reiterated. I specifically told the hon. Gentleman that is our ambition that the local tax should be in place on 1 April 1993. The hon. Gentleman rightly identified the two elements of the local tax, but I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend's statement on that, which was extremely clear.

The hon. Gentleman called on us to consult about the distribution of the £4·3 billion, but his hon. Friends have spent much of the day deriding us for so consulting. However, his hon. Friends have also spent much of the day praising the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), but he said that, on matters of taxation, which certainly includes the Budget, it is not possible to consult.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): We have got no details on the new tax and no legislation on those details is in the pipeline—two separate Bills will be needed for Scotland and for England and Wales. All the experts I have spoken to—finance officers and registration officers—in local government in Scotland say that it is impossible to introduce the tax by 1 April 1993. Those people are not elected members of authorities, but officials. Has the Minister had any conversations with those officials on the practicalities of the proposed tax?

Mr. Portillo: I reiterate that it is our ambition to introduce it by 1 April 1993.

It is interesting to note that, when the Government introduce a proposal, suddenly the Labour party says that it is impossible to do it so quickly. For the past couple of years, however, the Labour party has told us that one can do things overnight. I do not believe that the Labour party could even go back to the rates overnight—a proposal which would be deeply unpopular with and resented by the people.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was worried that I had misrepresented the Bill, but I thought

that I was careful to talk about £140 off the headline charge. In a response to a previous intervention from the hon. Member for Normanton, I discussed the position of those on benefits. The reduction in their bills would be £28, which is absolutely right since it is in proportion to the 20 per cent. of the charge that they are paying. I cannot accept that I have misrepresented what the Bill is about.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) was concerned about people who have left the electoral register. Perhaps he believes that they have done so to avoid paying the community charge, but the hon. Gentleman should consider what I said in the House on 13 March when I pointed out that a Labour party newspaper had carried an advertisement headed "Don't Register, Don't Pay". The hon. Gentleman may complain about people not registering, but he should acknowledge that the origin of that action is advice carried in a Labour party newspaper.

Mr. Harry Barnes: That paper is not an official Labour party document. Non-registration has occurred not because of a specific tactic encouraging it, but because people in desperate circumstances have ducked for cover. The bulk of such people are those coming up to 18. Statistics show that that has happened in Scotland and then in Wales and England. It has not happened in Northern Ireland, where the rate of registration by those attaining 18 is healthy.

The nature of the poll tax is unbearable, and some people have sold their franchise rights in desperation. No one should be placed in that situation, which undermines the Representation of the People Act 1983. If that Act has a higher constitutional standing than the poll tax, that tax is legally at fault, not the electoral registration law.

Mr. Portillo: I have no responsibility for electoral registration, which merely serves to emphasise the distinction that exists between community charge and electoral registers—they are two entirely separate registers. Having said that I have no responsibility for it, I am advised that there is no statistical evidence that the community charge is affecting the level of electoral registration. One of the effects of the community charge seems to be that there has been higher participation in local elections. More people are voting in local elections because they are more aware of the choices that they are being called upon to make.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): This year in Birmingham, there are still only about 705,000 people on the poll tax register. We are pleased to declare that there are 730,000 on the electoral register as a result of a deliberate campaign by the local authority to improve registration, which is now thought to be 97 per cent., because we got across to the people of the country and of our city that the only way to get rid of the poll tax was to register and to vote it away. There are some cities in the country where there has been a deplorable lack of efficiency—in particular, one area in London where they have lost 7,000 people off the electoral register. Frankly, that is a damned disgrace for the people in charge of that authority.

Mr. Portillo: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the only way that people can vote for or against anything is by being on the electoral register. I am sure that, from our different points of view, we all support the maximum number of people being on the electoral register, so that they can vote for the things that we believe in and against those that do them harm. I certainly urge them to register in large numbers. Fortunately, in the local elections in London last year, people voted against a lot of things that did them harm in what were formerly Labour boroughs.

After this further discussion, I still find no reason why the reductions of £140 for community charge payers should be delayed, as proposed in these amendments, and I continue to urge my hon. Friends to ensure that they are not accepted.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Maxton: I beg to move amendment No. 15, in page 1, line 5, after 'amount', insert

'payable by any person liable either to pay in full a personal community charge, or to pay a charge reduced from such an amount under the Community Charge reduction scheme.'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this we may take the following: Amendment No. 18, in page 1, line 8, after 'reduced', insert

'In respect of such a person'.

Amendment No. 21, in page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) Any amount payable by any person entitled to a rebate of 80 per cent. of a personal community charge shall from the relevant day be reduced in respect of the 1991 financial year by such sum in each case as will reduce the amount to £0.'.

Amendment No. 28, in clause 3, page 3, line 15, after 'year', insert

'(and payable by a person liable either to pay in full such a charge, or to pay a charge reduced from that amount under the Community Charge reduction scheme)'.

Amendment No. 32, in clause 3, page 3, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) The amount payable by a person entitled to a rebate of 80 per cent. of a personal community charge shall in respect of the 1991 financial year be reduced by such an amount as will reduce the amount to £0.'.

Amendment No. 35, in clause 3, page 3, line 31, at end insert—

'(3C) Notwithstanding anything in the 1987 Act, student nurses over the age of eighteen in full time training shall be absolved from payment when such payment would have been less than £140.'.

Amendment No. 36, in clause 3, page 3, line 31, at end insert—

'(3A) Notwithstanding anything in the 1987 Act, a person who is deemed to be liable for the community charge at the reduced rate of 20 per cent. shall be absolved from payment when such payment would have been less than £140.'.

Amendment No. 37, in clause 3, page 3, line 31, at end insert—

'(3B) Notwithstanding anything in the 1987 Act, a person over the age of eighteen in full time education shall be absolved from payment when such payment would have been less than £140.'.

New clause 2—*The 20 per cent. contribution in England and Wales*—

'( ) The charging authority shall, from the relevant date, no longer seek payments from those who would otherwise be required to pay 20 per cent. of the personal community charge.'.

New clause 3—*The 20 per cent. contribution in Scotland*—

'( ) The local authority shall, from the relevant date, no longer seek payments from those who would otherwise be required to pay 20 per cent. of the personal community charge.'.

Mr. Maxton: This group of amendments deals with the rebate system and the 20 per cent. minimum payment. It deals directly with an issue that the Government could deal with. It does not delay payment in any way and it will not cause any great problems for the Government, but we consider it to be vital.

I have been around the poll tax for longer than most hon. Members. I spoke in and wound up the Second Reading debate on the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill for the Opposition in December 1986. It seemed to come as a surprise to English Tory Members in our earlier debate that poll tax legislation for Scotland was introduced before the last general election.

I led the Labour party through the Committee stage of that Bill. It was a long and arduous task. Almost everything that Conservative Members have been saying about the poll tax—about its unworkability, the problems of collection and its unfairness—we mentioned in Committee during the winter of 1987, four years ago. We have continued to tell Conservative Members, over and over again, that that was what was wrong with the poll tax—it was unfair, unworkable and difficult to collect—and that they would have enormous problems with it. Even the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has privately admitted that I was right. I hope that he does not mind my repeating it. When I said that the poll tax would not be popular, he pooh-poohed the idea. He thought that the poll tax was one of the greatest election winners that the Tories had ever had. He now admits that, although, in his view, the poll tax is still right in principle, I was right to describe it as "very unworkable".

I do not believe that Opposition Members should now calmly accept things, stand back and say, "Oh well, at long last, the Government have learnt the lesson." Why should we simply accept that we suddenly have a lot of converts to our views among Conservative Members? The Government are now begging us to talk to them and to have discussions with them about all the various options that they are outlining. I say to them, "You're too late. We told you what was wrong. You had the opportunity to amend the provisions, and you never learn from your mistakes."

There is one thing on which I take issue with some of my hon. Friends. It is the description of the poll tax as the "flagship". The late Prime Minister certainly described it as such—[HON. MEMBERS: "Former."] Yes, I accept that. I should have said "the former Prime Minister". I know that the hon. Member for Stirling is one of those who is waiting for the time when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is Prime Minister again. The former Prime Minister certainly described the poll tax as the "flagship", but a flagship is not born in blind panic.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): If it comes to a choice between Conservative Members who supported the principle of the poll tax and those right hon. and hon. Members, many in government, who had no time for the poll tax but who, for career reasons, went along with it, defended it and apologised for it, does my hon. Friend agree that, while that may have been fair of the former Prime Minister, it is the latter whom we should hold in contempt much more than the former?

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend has a point, but I hold both of them in fairly equal contempt—those in the first group who still believe in the poll tax because they are stupid, and those in the second group because they are dishonest. Accordingly, both are worthy of our contempt. Some Conservative Members are now saying that they were always against the poll tax but did not resign from the Cabinet at that time because it was such a key issue.

The poll tax was born in blind panic. In 1985, the Tories—rightly, in our view—revalued properties for domestic and commercial rates—*[Interruption.]* We did not oppose that revaluation when the Tory Government introduced it. They then got into a total blind panic over it and refused to raise revenue support grant to ensure that the impact of the revalution did not hit their voters hardest.

Suddenly, the true Tories—the Eastwood, Stirling, and Bearsden Tories—started to say that they would not vote Tory again. The Tories went down to 12 per cent. in the opinion polls in Scotland. Only 12 per cent. of the electorate in Scotland said that they would vote Tory. Then what happened? The then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), went on to the platform at the Tory party conference and, faced with opposition from Tory voters at the conference said, "Rates are no longer an alternative. We are not going to keep them."

Suddenly, of course, the Tories had to find an alternative. That was the first time they were faced with that problem, because until then they had said, in their 1983 White Paper for example, that rates were the system of local government finance that they would have for the foreseeable future. Suddenly, however, the rates were to go. The Secretary of State for Scotland said it, and the former Prime Minister backed him and said the same. The Tory party suddenly had to find an alternative and the only thing that they could come up with was to go to the hon. Member for Stirling, whose scheme for a poll tax they had derided. That is how the poll tax was born. It was born in a panic, and it is now dying in a panic.

If, in 1985, the Government had found something like £250 million for Scotland and given it as rate support grant instead of introducing a poll tax, they would not have had to abolish the rates—and £250 million would have been a small sum in comparison with what they are now having to find to bail themselves out of the poll tax. If they had done that, rate bills would not have gone up, they would not have had to abolish rates and the crisis that we are now in would never have arisen.

At the core of the legislation when it eventually came was the absurd idea that everybody, with the exception of the mentally handicapped, had to pay something. We even had problems persuading the Government to accept that they should not be taxed. The poorest, the unemployed, the old-age pensioners, the physically disabled and even some mentally handicapped people had to pay at least 20 per cent. At the core of what we are trying to do in the amendments is an attempt to right for the next financial year that wrong done to so many people.

11.30 pm

The requirement to pay 20 per cent. has probably created more problems for the Government than anything else. Despite claims from the SNP about non-payment, about 80 per cent. of the people in Scotland who have not paid are on rebates. The vast majority of the 80 per cent are on the maximum rebate and have to find just the 20 per cent. There are 800,000 people in Scotland on that minimum payment. If we add to that total students,

student nurses and other groups on the minimum 20 per cent., we find that close to one third of all eligible poll tax payers supposedly have to find only 20 per cent.

The collection of the 20 per cent. causes enormous administrative problems for local authorities. We are talking about a payment of £80 to £90 per head. That might be reduced marginally by the Bill. The 800,000 will not get the reduction of £140; all they will get is a reduction of £28. Their poll tax will not be wiped out, as will happen to the wealthy people in Wandsworth and Westminster. They will still have to pay something.

As well as it being grossly unfair that some people should have to pay 20 per cent., collection causes great difficulty for all local authorities, not just Labour-controlled authorities. We suggest that the Government should use a comparatively small amount of the money that they are making available to local authorities to get rid of the 20 per cent. payment.

I am told that the amounts required to do away with the 20 per cent. would be £300,000 out of £4·3 billion for the United Kingdom and £30 million out of £500 million for Scotland. Instead of a reduction of £140 in everybody's poll tax, there would be a reduction of about £125. With three people in my household paying the poll tax, under the Bill we will benefit by £300-odd. I would be happy to accept a lower reduction in my poll tax to ensure that the poor do not have to pay anything. I am sure that all my hon. Friends would be happy to have a smaller reduction.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Write a cheque.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister says, "Write a cheque." For what purpose and to whom?

Mr. Bennett: To the Treasury.

Mr. Maxton: Fine. We know what happens to cheques written to the Treasury. They soon disappear into other things. Certainly, under this Government, the poor would never get the benefit of any cheque that I wrote to the Treasury.

The simple fact is that the Government have an opportunity to right one of the wrongs of their poll tax system. They have an opportunity to get rid of the 20 per cent. minimum and improve the rebate system. They ought also to backdate rebates to 1 April 1989 in Scotland to take out of the system people who should have had a rebate but never received it, or never claimed it. They now face two years of full bills. It would cost a small sum of money compared with the total to take those people out of the system, and it would right enormous wrongs. It would also reduce the administrative burdens on local authorities.

I have been pleading for the 20 per cent. minimum to be removed—the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) will admit that—ever since it was introduced. I have certainly argued that case during the past two years in the House at Question Time and after Question Time. The Government now have an opportunity to do it. I hope that they will take it. However, despite my pleas, not only do I expect not to achieve the abolition of the 20 per cent. minimum payment now, but it is unclear whether the same 20 per cent. minimum payment will remain under the new tax. We simply do not know. What we know from the Scottish Office, however, shows that the 20 per cent. will remain.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood, who will reply to the debate, will take this opportunity to show a little generosity. I am not asking much. I am not asking his constituents to give up large sums of money. It is just a small amount to help the poorest in our society, such as my constituents who live in Castlemilk, Easterhouse and Drumchapel. Getting rid of the 20 per cent. payment would remove an oppressive tax from them. Let that be the first step towards abolition of the tax, followed by the introduction of a fair rating system, which is the only method which can replace the poll tax fairly.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I wish to make a brief speech.

My credentials are as good as those of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). I too, perhaps from a different perspective, have argued the case for removing the ceiling on rebates for the community charge. I started doing so when the idea was first mooted in the 1985 Green Paper on social security reform. The first real evidence of independent worries about the issue was in the Social Security Advisory Committee report of that year. It said:

"Our concern is twofold: first, and most important, we believe that the proposal"

to put a ceiling on rebates for community charge

"could cause real hardship to many claimants, especially those on income support; and second, the proposal will cause local authorities extra administrative difficulties, and therefore higher administrative costs, at a time when the Government is committed to simplifying administration and controlling costs."

The committee's words in 1985 have come true. The Government were silly not to heed such independent advice. The Social Security Advisory Committee was not the only body to warn against the proposal. Other bodies did so, as did the hon. Member for Cathcart and I in the House. Those warnings went unheeded, and we all see the result this evening.

My purpose is briefly to speak to new clauses 2 and 3 tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends. While those new clauses may be technically incompetent, they are clear in their intention to try to persuade the Government at this eleventh hour to contemplate the abolition of the ceiling on rebates. It is important for the Minister to talk about the number of people who are caught by the ceiling on rebates and how much money is involved. In the debates in 1985 and 1986, the comments seemed unrealistic in terms of the sums involved and the impact that they were having.

Before the ceiling on rebates was introduced, about 3 million people were eligible for a 100 per cent. rebate on their rates under the old local government system. A further 4 million people had a partial rate rebate. Today, nobody gets a 100 per cent. rebate, so that significant change has had a considerable impact, particularly on low-income families.

The Government's justification for the change was that it would improve the link between payment and the use of services—that in some magical way there would be a resurgence in interest in what town halls and local authorities throughout the country were doing. There is little evidence, if that was the intention, that it was well founded.

Even people who follow these issues closely cannot make a direct correlation between Government grants, specific grants and the various means by which local

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

government finance is provided by central Government and other sources; so they cannot make a comparison between what was previously being spent on their behalf by local authorities and what was spent following the introduction of the so-called system of accountability.

If the Government are looking for a system that gives more accountability in local government, they should examine the way in which local authorities are elected. A system of electoral reform that included proportional representation would give a more sensitive system to meet the needs and wishes of local people.

From a social security point of view, the £1·30 increase in income support that was given in 1987 to try to compensate people for paying a 20 per cent. contribution towards the poll tax was totally inadequate and reduced the already meagre levels of income support available to many claimants. About 17,000 claimants north of the border are now having deductions taken from their income support payments to make contributions towards poll tax arrears. That is a scandal and a disgrace.

I remind the Committee that, on their proposal to impose a ceiling on the rebate system, the Government were defeated in the other place in June 1986. Their Lordships withdrew a provision designed to impose a cap on the poll tax rebate system. The Government were wrong to reintroduce the proposal and reverse in this House that decision of the other place. We have been paying the price for that ever since.

Experience of the ceiling on the poll tax rebate for the last two or three years has revealed a two-tier system of local government. There is the kind of local government that can be provided and paid for in relatively stable areas of population, such as in the borders and my constituency, where there is less of a turnover in population and the people are perhaps more law-abiding than in other parts of the country. That applies to my constituent, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). It certainly applies to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who pays his debts, is kind to animals and treats his wife well.

In districts such as the borders, there is a stable population, so it is much easier for the poll tax to be administered and collection rates can be more than 90 per cent. to a semi-reasonable extent. But it is impossible to do so in urban districts such as Glasgow, Strathclyde, Edinburgh and Dundee. The Audit Commission has found it impossible to achieve those relatively high levels of collection in such regions. That is the inevitable consequence of the development of a two-tier system of local government.

The level of services one can enjoy depends on where one lives. If one lives in an urban context, one's services are reduced, but if one lives in a landward district, the services tend to be better financed and better provided. It is wrong that such a consequence should flow from poll tax legislation.

11.45 pm

It is absurd when the amount to be collected from many people will be less than the cost of collecting the tax. That cannot be sensible in any system. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) told me earlier this evening that the poll tax contribution to be solicited from students in Shetland is £9, but it will cost nearly three times that amount to collect that poll tax from students, which seems to be completely stupid. That contrasts with the provisions now being made for Wandsworth, where, by and large, residents can easily afford to pay for local services. They will not now be paying anything. The principle that everyone pays is clearly no longer the case.

As the hon. Member for Cathcart said, the Scottish experience is that a significant number of those facing action as a result of non-payment, certainly in Scotland, are those paying the 20 per cent. contribution. The latest estimate is that 70 per cent. of those facing court action in Scotland are 20 per cent. contributors. That is quite wrong, and the Government should do something to put it right.

In its report earlier this month, the Audit Commission showed that 30 per cent. of authorities reported a significant problem of unprocessed benefit applications. That is wrong and the Government should do something about it. Clearly, the costs of collecting the poll tax previously, today and in future are fixed. The Government should recognise that, as they should recognise that many people are suffering great hardship—most of them income support claimants and many of them pensioners. They are being subjected to the 20 per cent. contribution, which is immoral, unjust and an administrative nightmare. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity of the amendments, at this eleventh hour, to make sensible changes to make the system much better, more easily administered and much fairer to those who are least able to pay.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I did not intend to speak this evening, and I shall be brief. I want to make only one point. I am grateful for what the Government have done. I have been implacably opposed to this tax from the word go, as Opposition Members know. I did not support it at any stage. But we are now moving rapidly towards its abolition, for which I am extremely grateful. I believe that the Government are entirely right to consult widely to get the system right.

The 20 per cent. contribution system is nonsense. Its collection costs are often more than the sum collected. I discussed collection with the treasurer in south Staffordshire a fortnight ago. It is a prudently managed authority, where about 93 per cent. of the tax has already been collected this year. It is not a question of being unable to collect the tax or of having constituents who do not pay. The cost of collecting the contribution of those who pay only 20 per cent. of the charge far exceeds the yield. That applies especially to students, who quite legitimately might have two or three abodes in the course of a year.

I accept that we are debating an interim measure, and I fully understand the Government's line. I hope that, when the new system is in place, people who at the moment qualify for 80 per cent. rebate will not be charged. We should not charge the non-earning spouse, the student or the non-householder over the age of 70. I hope that we can look at the detail of such matters and that we shall do so quickly. In future, may we please have no 20 per centers?

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): This is an interesting debate. Amendments Nos. 35 and 42 in my name and those of my hon. Friends, relate to the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). Experience in Scotland has

clearly shown that the poll tax has failed not just because of its unfairness and injustice, but because in many areas it is uncollectable. That is not because, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) averred, I and others have suggested that people should not pay and have led them into debt, but manifestly because people on low incomes do not have the resources to pay.

The hon. Member for Garscadden yawns. I am sorry if I am boring him. He cannot say that 80 per cent. of those who are not paying cannot pay while at the same time saying that they should obey the law and pay. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) is in her place——

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The hon. Gentleman has called off his non-payment campaign.

Mr. Douglas: We had it for some time in Scotland. People like the hon. Gentleman do not worry me in the slightest. Dinna fash yoursel'. Haud your wheesht. Belt up. On 15 September 1988, the hon. Member for Maryhill said:

"Non-payment is for us an act of solidarity with those who won't pay because they can't pay."

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Douglas: I am happy to do so.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman will recall that those were my sentiments, and I still think that embarking upon such a campaign was justified at that time. However, when Strathclyde regional council later found itself in extreme financial difficulties and faced the prospect of paying off staff, especially low-paid staff, some of us changed our minds and decided to pay up. Plainly, the hon. Gentleman does not agree with that, because he waited until his party had abandoned its non-payment campaign. When he quotes me, perhaps he would quote the record in full.

Mr. Douglas: People are entitled to change their minds. *[Interrruption.]* It is one thing to have a change of mind when the poll tax is manifestly dead; it is quite another to tell people in legalistic terms, as the hon. Member for Garscadden has, that people should pay because it is the law, when he knows that they cannot pay.

The hon. Member for Garscadden spoke earlier about those with senile dementia, and the hon. Member for Cathcart spoke of the severely mentally handicapped. Both hon. Members know the fight that Opposition parties put up to have those groups excluded. Time and again, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that it was impossible to exclude those suffering from senile dementia.

The Scottish National party asked the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland what people should do, and he kept advising them to pay. The tax has now been defeated not because of what happened in the House but because of what happened outside. I believe passionately in parliamentary democracy, but a balance has to be struck, and that element should not be put on too high a pinnacle. When the Prime Minister tells people outside the House that votes cast against his party and its policies in a by-election are rubbish bin votes, and when people demonstrate because that is their only way to protest against the onerous tax, and when these factors are ignored, particularly in Scotland, people are left with little alternative but to defeat the tax by not paying it. That course of action is still advocated by some on the Opposition Benches.

Non-payment has made a significant contribution to non-collectibility. What advice is the hon. Member for Garscadden giving local authorities in Scotland? They are pursing diligence on the very people who he has said cannot pay.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhonnda): The hon. Gentleman talked about rubbish bin votes. What would happen in his community if nobody paid the tax? In the past couple of years, has he put out rubbish bins? If so, who has paid for them to be collected? What will happen to old people's homes, social services and other facilities if no one pays the tax? He does not have the sole lien on non-payment or opposition to the poll tax. Many of us thought that, if local services were to be maintained for those who needed them, we should have to pay the tax.

Mr. Douglas: I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I come back to my initial position. Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen on Scottish matters cannot say that 80 per cent. of those who are not paying cannot pay but that they ought to obey the law and pay. There is an inherent contradiction there. I am asking the hon. Members for Cathcart and for Garscadden whether, through the Labour party, they are telling local authorities in Scotland to desist from diligence because of the onerous nature of the imposition of poinding, and from threatening warrant sales on those people. They should desist from making sheriff orders—there have been 300,000 in Strathclyde alone—and from hounding the very people whom hon. Members have said cannot pay. I will give way to the hon. Member for Garscadden on this point, but he is silent when asked what advice he will give.

Mr. Dewar: I should be more inclined to take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously if, when he offers himself to his electorate, who know him well, he gets elected.

Mr. Douglas: When I stood for election in 1987, I made it patently clear that I would not pay. The Labour party went about lying in their teeth about me. I lost my honorary membership of the National Union of Mineworkers because honourable people like them—I use the word "honourable" loosely—went about telling lies. If the hon. Member for Garscadden wants me to give way again, I am willing to do so. We know what happened in Scotland. We have the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities figures. It argues that, because of non-payment in Scotland, at present no recovery action can be taken against non-payers until they are three months or more in arrears, and that, on such a timetable, it would not be fully possible to pursue non-payers until October or November next year.

12 am

We know that the system of local authority finance is collapsing. I told the hon. Members for Garscadden and for Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) ages ago that, if a Labour Government came to power on a Thursday, no one in Scotland would pay the poll tax the following Monday. I asked them what they would do then, and what interim measure they would put in place.

The Government have produced an interim measure. It is not entirely satisfactory, but the House has chosen not to vote against it. In effect, it is a concealed income tax. I

do not know anyone who pays taxes out of anything other than income, but some Conservative Members may take a different view. On both sides this is a huge facade—a farrago—to establish other taxation systems to collect £1 in every £10 of local authority revenue.

Would the Labour party repeal this measure if it came to power after the next election? Of course it would repeal the poll tax, but what would it put in its place? It would put some form of rating in its place. How long would that take? It would take two or three years. The hon. Member for Garscadden said this morning that the Labour party could do it by April—April of the following year. That would be an interim measure. The Scottish National party has submitted to the Secretary of State details of a local income tax that could be introduced very quickly in Scotland.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going very wide of the amendments that are before the Committee. I hope that he will return to them.

Mr. Douglas: With great respect, Mr. Walker, I am suggesting that, if we had a local income tax, those who could not pay—assessed in relation to their income—would not pay. That is a fair system of taxation. That is what the amendments deal with—the poorer sections of the population who should not be brought into the local government taxation system anyhow, for the simple reason that the idea that everybody should make a contribution to local authority revenue is nothing but a lot of damned nonsense.

When we ask Conservative Members about Wandsworth, their reply is, "Ah, but people in Wandsworth pay for it through general taxation." So why not relate ability to pay to general taxation? We were told earlier that this was an interim measure. The Secretary of State suggested that the value added tax to be used as a supplement this year will not be available next year and that, under rate support grant measures, general revenue will be used.

We have argued very forcefully that the poorest sections of the population—students, student nurses, people on income support, the disabled, the unemployed—should not be brought within the orbit of the tax because it is clear that they cannot pay.

However, if there is a vote on amendment No. 15, the Government's majority will undoubtedly carry the day. I hope that the Government will ultimately consider a system of taxation that excludes certain people. What is needed, particularly in Scotland, is a system that takes account of people's ability to pay. Our figures were rubbished simultaneously by the Government and the Labour party. Scotland could have a local income tax to replace the 10 per cent. or thereabouts that would come from the residue of the poll tax. The cost would be 3p or 4p in the pound. The system could be authorised by an independent Scottish parliament and operated by that parliament through, and in harmony with, single-tier local authorities. That will not be possible if the Government persist with the stupid notion that everyone must pay for local services.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Bar): Having attended all the poll tax debates, including those relating to Scotland, I never cease to be amazed at the way the Scottish National party attacks the Labour party more than it attacks the Tories. My impression has not been changed by the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas).

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No.

The amendments before the Committee relate to people who, by definition, are the poorest in the country. People who have to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax are required to pay 100 per cent. of the water rates. Like all other hon. Members, I have constituents who pay water rates amounting to twice the poll tax charge. They do not quite understand that. It is beyond belief that anyone should be asked to pay a water rate of £150 in respect of a two-bedroom inner-city flat in Birmingham. For such people, the poll tax is the last straw.

Let us be clear what will happen when the Bill is on the statute book. I take the Labour party view. Even if guillotines and other devices have been used, a tax that has been approved by Parliament is legal. We know, however, that this tax is immoral and unfair. Money has to be collected to pay for the services required by the poor and the disabled. People who cannot pay have to be pursued. Bearing in mind the events of the past 10 days, I do not know how any reasonable local authority could issue summonses against such people for the purpose of enforcing poll tax charges of 20 per cent.

The Government have said that the poll tax is going. Or have they? They are rushing this Bill through Parliament. The Prime Minister has spoken. We have heard all the arguments about the cost of collection. We know that hardly anybody in Wandsworth or Westminster will contribute directly to local government finance. How can any responsible local authority of any political persuasion carry on issuing summonses for those paying 20 per cent.?

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No, I am not giving way to a member of the Scottish National party.

I do not see how that policy can be pursued. That is a real dilemma for responsible local authorities. They know full well that the Government are not prepared to bend. I know that the Government will not accept the amendments, but I believe that they will be forced by circumstances to move on this issue and perhaps on a couple mentioned by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). That is inevitable. They are on the slippery slope. This is more than the thin end of the wedge. The rush is on, and I am convinced that the Government will have to move.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No. For the avoidance of doubt, I am not giving way to a member of the SNP. Okay? Right. I say that after my visit to Scotland last Friday. My views were reinforced after discussions with many of my political friends in the nation.

We could have avoided being in this situation. During the passage of the original legislation, the Government could answer hardly any questions about losers and gainers. They could answer hardly any questions about those on rebates. When we asked in November 1989 what information the Government had as they set out on pushing their flagship through Parliament, they said that

no estimate has been made of the likely numbers on rebate in each local authority. On 13 January 1988, the Government said that no information was available on the proportion of households with below-average income and in receipt of rate rebates. On 15 December 1987, the Government were unable to give information on 18 to 25-year-olds gaining and losing. Those are just three examples from a list of about 30 points that I made at the time on which the Government had no information. They could not answer detailed questions as they launched their flagship.

The Government are in the same position now. They cannot tell the House how many people will receive £140 off their poll tax or less than £140 off their poll tax. The other week, the Government boasted that more than half the poll tax payers in England—18 million-plus—would benefit either from the rebate or from the reduction scheme. They boasted that half would pay less than the full amount, but they cannot quite bring themselves to admit now that, by definition, if more than 50 per cent. gained under the old scheme, more than 50 per cent. of adults in England will not receive £140 off their bills. The one follows the other. What the Government cannot give us tonight, and what they should give us tonight, is a breakdown of those who will not get the full £140 including those paying 20 per cent. whom we are trying to exempt with our amendments.

I was reminding myself of what was said during the passage of the legislation, and I came across a few gems that I want to share with the House. We are talking about something that affects millions of our fellow citizens—your constituents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and mine. Just listen to this:

"Every time I hear people squeal I am more than ever certain that we are right".

That was the former Secretary of State—the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—who has not had the courage to appear in the Chamber once today.

We put the same point to the right hon. Gentleman repeatedly. In Committee, he said—I am not quoting him out of context; the details will be in the record—

"With a flat rate charge, it must be true that the burden will fall more heavily on those with low incomes than on those with high incomes."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E;* 23 February 1988, c. 936.]

We know that; we kept telling him that. That is why the poll tax flat rate is unfair, and why taking £140 off the top figure, rather than the bottom figure, is still unfair to the low paid.

12.15 am

I should like to share with the House another quotation from the record of that debate. I have given the hon. Member concerned notice. During that debate, my hon. Friends and I tried to secure a 100 per cent. rebate to protect the poorest in the land. We do not accept the "holy grail" dictum that everyone should make a contribution—people are contributing through the general tax system every time they buy a VAT-rated good.

The hon. Gentleman to whom I refer said in Committee:

"Above all, I am worried because in recent years we have seen the development of two societies. I wholeheartedly support the Government for having helped to achieve growing prosperity for the majority of our citizens. However, we have also created an under class of hapless people who are in enormous personal difficulties."

That was before the poll tax was introduced. The hon. Gentleman continued:

"I am sure that hon. Members share my constituency experiences, except if they happen to represent such areas as Sunningdale . . . I represent a prosperous area, too."

In his authority, he said:

"we shall, on balance, benefit by the introduction of the measure. However, constituents no longer approach us, as Members of Parliament, with the same financial and social problems that, a few years ago, we could have solved with relative ease. We could break through local authority bureaucracy and contact our ministerial colleagues to obtain help with their problems. They were manageable and solvable. Sadly, that no longer applies.

I am not over-dramatising the position, but I have noticed the haunted look in the eyes of people who shuffle into my surgery."

I shall repeat that, for the benefit of any hon. Member who has not witnessed the same thing since the introduction of the poll tax in England:

"I am not over-dramatising the position, but I have noticed the haunted look in the eyes of people who shuffle into my surgery. They have been caught in the poverty trap which has come about by a combination of our benefits and tax system and low income. The proposals are an understandable reaction by the Government faced with such an awkward situation. I am sure that they wanted to impose the poll tax on everyone. But we must have a benefit system, otherwise there would be an outcry because of the additional burden on the poorest members of our society who are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

We have a get-rich-quick, materialistic environment. It scorns people who cannot keep up with it. That is also distressing for parliamentarians. People need our help; they must not be kicked in the teeth by a system that is becoming increasingly hard on them. They might be regarded by hard newspapers, such as the *Daily Express* and *The Sun* as the unsuccessful minority about whom we should not worry too much. Those newspapers probably advocate a small support system at the margin that will just keep such people going. That is the most severe charge facing all parliamentarians when we consider even the small details of the proposals."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E;* 23 February 1988, c. 884.]

I am quoting the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), the Tory Member who has usually backed us all the way on the poll tax. That could have been said by any Opposition Member, but I venture to say that not many Tory Members could have said it.

I should like to think that, in the past two years—and certainly in the past year—Conservative Members had learnt some of the lessons. People may have shuffled into their surgeries, if they have them and if they are available, unlike the situation in some constituencies where people have to wait nine months for an appointment and where they only get to see their Member of Parliament when they have written a letter to the local newspaper. It happened in a midlands constituency, which I shall not name——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Name him.

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Member concerned is not here, so it would not be fair. I would name him otherwise.

The position has got worse because of the imposition of the 20 per cent., which also gives the Government a convenient loophole when they talk about losers and gainers. By introducing the 20 per cent. the year before the poll tax came into operation in England, they try to compare like with unlike. They should compare the present position with what was happening before, when the poorest paid taxes through VAT and other excise duties but were exempt from the local tax, as they were exempt from income tax, on the ground of low income.

[Mr. Rooker]

That is only fair in our society. Given that the system does not make sense from a practical or from a financial point of view, and given that it does not make sense from a moral point of view when the Bill will give £280——

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No, I have nearly finished.

We shall give £280 to a person who owns a second home and who, by definition, would not be getting a rebate under the Bill, and we shall give him £140 off the poll tax for his first home, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said earlier. The person who will not have a penny piece rebate will receive a £420 handout, but only £28 will go to the person with only income support. We know that such a person will pay more than that once he has spent more than a half dozen weeks' benefit money. After £1,100 of expenditure liable to VAT, his gain will have gone, whereas everyone else will have to spend £13,000 before the benefits are wiped out. How can that be fair? How can it be fair for someone with a second home, who does not have a penny piece rebate because he is not entitled to it, to have £280 when there will be only £28 for the poorest?

If the Government had any sense, they would accept the amendment. If they had any sense, they would have listened to us in 1988 and not proceeded with the poll tax. We told them then from the Dispatch Box that we would bury the Government with the poll tax legislation, and bury them we will.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I shared many long hours in Committee with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and I am heartily glad to see the poll tax now coming to an end. I intend to be brief. We are talking on those of the lowest incomes who face bills that, although lower, are difficult for them to pay. I listened with considerable interest to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) a few minutes ago. He spoke a lot of sense. The Government would be well advised to listen to him.

If the Government go ahead and insist, during the two-years interim period before the new scheme comes about, that everyone must continue to pay, they will put a millstone around people on low incomes who have considerable difficulty paying and around local authorities which have to collect payments at a cost that, in many cases, exceeds those payments.

In Wales, we have a level of poll tax that is, on average, lower than that in England or in Scotland. It will cost more to collect payments from people on the 20 per cent. level than they pay. That makes no sense from the point of view of the individuals who are suffering, or from the point of view of local authorities. Surely there is a need to reconsider the matter.

If the Government based their case on the need for every individual to make a payment, they have surely conceded that case with the abandonment of bills to individuals and with the introduction of only household bills from 1993. They have also abandoned the principle in cases such as Wandsworth, where many people will not receive bills. The Government have also acknowledged the difficult position of some authorities where minimal payments may be made. As one Minister said, that would be a matter for the discretion of the authority. We need some clarification about how far that discretion goes.

If some areas end up with a residual charge of £3 or £5, do local authorities have the right to waive that bill? Are they expected to pursue those bills although it may cost £50 or £100 to collect them? The Government must tackle that problem. If they had any sense, they would accept the amendments on that issue, or they could table an amendment even at this late stage.

The Government should find a way in which to ensure that those on a low income, the unemployed, the disabled and pensioners—those who receive 80 per cent. benefit on the poll tax—are exempt from the new charges. That would remove the pain suffered by those many people who have had to go to court because they have not paid their local authorities.

A few weeks ago, I was in court in Caernarfon. A thousand non-payment cases came before it that day. A large proportion of those cases involved people who receive 80 per cent. benefit but who still do not have the resources to pay the 20 per cent. It is not in the interests of central and local government, or good government, to pursue cases in such a manner.

It is not too late for the Government to acknowledge the argument that has been advanced by all parties in the House. Even now they could find a way in which to free those on a low income and in receipt of support from the iniquitous poll tax. That would mean that local authorities would have a much easier job in the next two years until we bury the poll tax once and for all.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I echo the words of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—the sooner we bury the poll tax the better. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) will know that I have opposed it throughout.

I shall weary the House for just two minutes as I illustrate the nonsensical unfairness of the system by quoting my family circumstances. First, my wife and I are classed as two payers. She has never paid the rates and she does not pay the poll tax—that exposes the fiction that more people paid the poll tax. We know that that was nonsense.

In Westminster, my rates were £1,200. Last year, because it is a second home, they came down to £380—now they are down to £72, but I do not claim to be one of the poorest in the country. Last year we were in receipt of transitional relief on our home in Dorset and, this year, my wife and I will be receiving £220 of Government grant. I know perfectly well that I am receiving that money while many on a quarter of my income are not getting any relief.

Yesterday, I received a letter from the hotel in Cornwall where my wife and I intend to spend the summer holiday. The management told me, quite fairly, that, as a result of the increase in VAT, the price of our holiday will be increased by 2·5 per cent. I accept that, as it is an expensive hotel. I shall enjoy staying there, and I shall happily pay that extra VAT in the knowledge that I do not have to spend that money, but that I want to, because I can afford to stay in a decent hotel. I shall be paying that contribution in accordance with my ability to pay.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to stop the nonsense. Let us get out of this unfair and unworkable tax at the earliest opportunity. I am not the only one to argue that we should use as much of central Government

taxation as possible to pay for local services. I do not recall Lieutenant General de la Billière saying that he felt guilty about using his tanks in the Gulf because he had not raised the money for them. I have never appreciated the logic of certain local councillors who have said that, unless they raised the money, they did not feel justified in spending it. The best way in which to assess the value of a local councillor is not how he raises the money, but how he spends it. The less money we spend on raising local taxes the more we shall have to spend on services.

We all know that the poll tax is to be buried. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to stop pretending to everyone —let us get rid of it at the earliest possible opportunity.

12.30 am

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I am sure that we all listened with respect to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), who has just spoken, and to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who have both always been honourable and consistent in their opposition to the poll tax.

Perhaps it is appropriate that I should say that I come to praise at least one aspect of the poll tax from the Opposition Benches. The one credit that I can give the poll tax is that it finally blew the cover on the elaborate deception of the 1980s to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) alluded—that local government expenditure was rising at an unacceptable pace. The truth of the matter is that, throughout the 1980s, the central Government contribution was being steadily reduced and the levy that had to be made upon ratepayers to bridge the gap was rising. That was commonplace.

Then came the poll tax. My first introduction to it was in 1986, when I was a local government chairman of finance and I went to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy conference in Scarborough—a serious conference, attended by all the weighty professional bodies and institutions concerned with local government finance. The community charge proposals were unveiled there. I remember being astounded at the weight of opposition to the proposals.

The Government were advised then that the administration of the tax would be horrendously complex and expensive; that implementation would be fraught with anomalies and unfairness; that people would delay payment; and that it would be difficult to police. However, for them to take notice of that weight of distinguished advice would have smacked of consultation—a word which had no place in the Tory lexicon in those days of certainty and decisiveness. And so the poll tax came to pass—or perhaps I should say that it was passed.

Knowsley's standard spending assessment for 1990-91 was £278, and we levied a poll tax of £365, which is a difference of £87. Why? Because no allowance had been made for expected increases in bad debts, which accounted for £15 a head, or for extra costs of collection, which came to £15 per head; there was an unrealistic inflation allowance of 4·6 per cent., when inflation was 7·7 per cent., which accounted for £30 per head; and finally, and worst of all, Knowsley, the poorest local authority in the land, contributed £16 per head to the safety net, to bail out the likes of Wandsworth. That amounts to £76 out of the £87, leaving £11, which is easily and fairly accounted for by the inadequacy of the funding formula, which recognised factors that favoured Wandsworth and Westminster, but gave insufficient recognition to Knowsley's manifest social needs.

If Knowsley had received Wandsworth's level of grant allocation in that year, the poll tax would have been reduced by £15, and if it had been given Westminster's, the tax would have been a mere £56·47. That is merely taking into consideration the rate support grant and non-domestic rating contributions, and not all the other fiddles or grants which were given to Wandsworth and Westminster. Knowsley's poll tax could have been in——

The Chairman: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is going to come to the amendments that are before the Committee.

Mr. O'Hara: Indeed I am. Knowsley's poll tax in 1991-92 was £424·60—£54 more, of which £42 was made up of losses on collection, interest charges and deficits on the collection fund. It could have been a negative figure if Knowsley had been given the same level of grant as Westminster. That is the fulfilment of predictions in 1986 about complexity, expense, anomaly, unfairness, evasions and accumulation of bad debts, and that is only the financial story.

Now, Mr. Walker, I come to the amendments. There have been cuts in education, affecting hundreds of teachers, and the youth service has been wiped out. Social and leisure services have been affected, as have the voluntary bodies, including the citizens advice bureaux and the money advice centres, which have been losing their funding. Yet we know that 81 per cent. of the clients coming to the money advice centres in Knowsley are those affected by the 20 per cent. rule. They are coming to those money advice centres in desperation for advice on how to find that 20 per cent.

As I have said, the one saving grace of all this is that these crazy sums have blown the Government's cover, exploded the myth of council extravagence and laid the blame at the Government's door as scheme after elastoplast scheme has been devised to cover the gaping wounds. Hence the community charge reduction scheme, with the Government scaling new heights of gerrymandering. The fourth such scheme was introduced nine short weeks ago, and we now have this Bill of amendment. To stay in order, Mr. Walker, and to refer to the amendments, I must add that perhaps this amendment is the Government's last chance to inject just a grain of fairness into the Bill by taking account of those who will pay 20 per cent. and allocating a moderate sum from the £4·5 billion to alleviate that distress.

I conclude with my personal epitaph on this sorry story. We have had plenty of imagery—of the 'three-card trick' management of the community charge, and of 'circus sideshow trickery'. Hon. Members will have heard of Nero, the Roman emperor who fiddled while Rome burned. In 68 AD, he was assassinated. Interestingly, there was then a civil war and a series of four emperors in that year. I wonder whether that is an omen. One of those emperors, Vitellius, was immortalised by the historian Tacitus in "Capax imperii nisi imperasset", which means, "Capable of being emperor, if only he had not become emperor," or, more felicitiously translated, "An emperor with a glorious future behind him." Perhaps the poll tax will show that we have a Prime Minister with a glorious

future behind him.

Mr. Tony Banks: I rise to speak in favour of the amendments, but I shall be brief, having sat through all our proceedings. I send that message to my Chief Whip with great love and affection. In view of the quotation just given by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), I shall try to be as taciturn as I can.

The amendment seeks to remove what is clearly the most unpopular aspect of the poll tax. The tax has many injustices, but requiring people on the lowest level of income in our society—those on income support—to make a payment is so cruel that hon. Members of all parties have now recognised that.

I pay great tribute to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) for having been so frank in telling the House his personal circumstances. I hope that Conservative Members will investigate and examine their consciences in the same way as the hon. Member for Christchurch has. When they do, I think that they will come to the same conclusion—that the amendment must be carried and that the idea of the poorest paying 20 per cent. has to go.

We understand the reasons for the rule—at least, we understand the words that were used to explain it—that everyone who benefits from local authority services should make some contribution. But it is perhaps surprising that that principle is not applied to the payment of income tax and to voting at the national level. After all, many people do not pay income tax—such as those who are unemployed and those who are on income support—but I have not heard any Conservative Member suggest that, because those people are not contributing to the services provided nationally by central Government, their general election vote should be taken from them. If the Government want to be consistent, they must take the vote away from people who do not pay income tax or allow people who cannot afford to contribute to continue to

We know many people who cannot afford to contribute. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) gave details from a speech made by the now somnolent figure of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). It was a very good speech, but obviously not one that he can recall at the moment. No doubt he is seeking inspiration. I see that he has once again joined the land of the conscious. He made a very good speech in Committee. He made it clear that it was upsetting for hon. Members as well as for their constituents when people found themselves in a position where they could not pay.

I am not so concerned about people who made a political gesture. Although that is an honourable attitude to adopt, those who do so must take the political consequences. There is a role in politics for those who consider a tax to be immoral and an imposition and who refuse to pay it. I was more concerned about those who could not afford to pay and those who broke down in tears in my advice surgery. They are the people we have to look after. They are the people who are still caught up by the poll tax.

Great play has been made of the fact that there is to be a reduction of £140. As we know, for those on income support the reduction will be only £28. They will get just 20 per cent. of the £140, but they will be paying 100 per cent. of the 2·5 per cent. increase on VAT—no one has suggested that they should pay only 20 per cent. of that—so the poorest members of society are still being asked to pay the poll tax disproportionately. Figures have been given in the debate to show that it is the poorest 10 per cent. who pay proportionately far more of their income on VAT-charged goods and services than the richest 10 per cent. That is grossly unfair.

If hon. Members will be as decent as the hon. Member for Christchurch and examine their consciences, they will realise that they are voting to benefit themselves to the disadvantage of the poorest people in this country, and will do as the hon. Member for Christchurch will no doubt be doing and join us in the Lobby in support of the amendment.

Mr. Salmond: I intend to be very brief. To avoid any doubt, I will not give way to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). However, I should like to support two of his arguments. The first has been expressed by many hon. Members in the debate: it is now long past time to get the poll tax off the backs of the poor. The £140 should not be a top-line reduction but a bottom-line reduction, taking not just the 20 per cent. but many of the low-paid out of the poll tax net.

The Government have a stark choice: they can make that concession now with as much good grace as they can muster, or they can have it forced on them in coming weeks and months. That concession is coming, not because of any generosity of spirit in the Tory party but purely because the tax is uncollectable, to use the Prime Minister's word, from the poorest people.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr advanced a second argument. I am sorry to say that he did not have the courtesy to say that he was reflecting that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) a few seconds earlier. He said that, in current circumstances, it would be insupportable for any local authority to pursue by civil diligence those who cannot afford to pay the poll tax. If the hon. Member for Perry Barr could communicate to his Scottish Front Bench colleagues, the hon. Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the need to take the poll tax off the backs of the Scottish poor, I might not express some of my criticisms of the Labour party.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I thought that I had heard some two thirds of the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) before—indeed, on several occasions. He was kind enough to pay a compliment to the good people of Eastwood. The good people of Eastwood look forward to hearing and analysing the Labour party's proposals for replacing the Government's proposed system. I assure him that the good people of Eastwood will be fully informed of the Labour party's proposals.

12.45 am

Mr. Maxton: I wonder whether the good people of Eastwood are equally attracted to the idea of single-tier local authorities, which will inevitably lead Eastwood to be part of Glasgow.

Mr. Stewart: I know that that is the policy of the hon. Member for Cathcart. He has confirmed it on many occasions. There are many possible formulae for single-tier authorities. I suggest—*[Interruption.]* I see that Opposition Members are becoming a little restive about my being tempted down that path by the hon. Gentleman.

We have had two debates this evening. First, there was the well-considered debate, with speeches from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) —I certainly would not challenge his credentials in this matter—and my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). I am sure that my hon. Friends will consider carefully the points that my hon. Friend made about the future. We had a speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and the House appreciated the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) improving the class of the debate considerably at one point.

Then there was the sub-plot to the debate. At some points, I felt that I did not wish to intrude on the private grief of Opposition Members. I wondered whether we would ever get a word in edgeways. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), leading off for the Scottish National party, asked 26 questions by my count, 25 of which were directed at the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Cathcart. It is rumoured in the press that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West intends to challenge one of those hon. Gentlemen at the next general election. I am sure that that will be—I was about to say a battle of the titans, but I am not sure that that is an appropriate phrase. Certainly it will be a battle worth watching.

Mr. Douglas: I may stand against the Minister.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to stand against me if he wishes to do so.

The amendments fall into two sub-groups—if that is the correct word. First, there are the amendments which seek to give those who already benefit from the community charge reduction scheme the full charge reduction under the Bill. The House will agree that the scheme has been generously improved, especially as result of the statement of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities. Secondly, amendments have been tabled by hon. Members representing the Official Opposition, the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats and by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) that have the broad effect of eliminating charge payments for those who would otherwise pay 20 per cent.

The purpose of the Bill is to achieve a general reduction of £140 in the headline personal community charge figure. As a result of the eloquence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland when replying to the Second Reading debate, the House did not seek to challenge that principle. The importance of that principle must be emphasised against the background of what has happened.

The hon. Member for Garscadden defended the expenditure patterns of Scottish councils, but they have increased the charge by 30 per cent. this year. Their expenditure remains about 30 per cent. per adult higher than expenditure in England or Wales. The regional councils have loaded two years of non-payment on to one year and rebuilt balances after election year.

As hon. Members have said, by no means everybody pays the headline charge, because they benefit from the community charge reduction scheme or because students benefit from the reduced charge. Others have the advantage of the community charge benefit. Those who benefit from charge assistance would, if the Opposition formula was adopted, benefit twice. The principle of the Bill is that people should benefit from the reduction in proportion of the amount of headline charge that they pay.

Mr. Kirkwood: It would help the Committee if the Minister would say about how much money we are arguing. How much would it cost to abolish the rebate system ceiling?

Mr. Stewart: I do not have a specific figure to hand.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: The House is anxious to proceed, but I will give way a final time.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Minister challenge COSLA's figure of £30 million? Will he, when he meets COSLA on 8 April, clarify that and let us know? The £30 million figure appears to be given with some authority and substance.

Mr. Stewart: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will analyse the COSLA figure.

There is a well defined principle here—that, with well defined exemptions, all adults should make a direct contribution to the services that they use. That principle of accountability is important and has had an effect in Scotland, as could be seen by the behaviour of Scottish regional councils last year, election year. In 1990-91, broadly speaking, they increased the community charge by about the level of inflation. It is interesting to note that this year, without elections, they have sharply increased the figures.

Mr. Harry Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I have given way twice, and I now wish to proceed.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) was concerned with the issue of waiving. The general principle is that an authority is not obliged to pursue collection if the action would not be cost effective—that is, if it would not be in the overall financial interest of its charge payers. It is for the individual authority to decide in each case whether the principle is satisfied. I think that an authority is likely to set its general approach in the light of the views of its auditor.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) alleged that the community charge was uncollectable. That is simply not the case in Scotland. Of course there are those who have not paid, but the idea that in Scotland there is an enormous dedicated army of people who have not paid is not true. There are variations in Scotland. In the hon. Gentleman's regional council, Fife has an excellent record of collection. It is a primarily industrial area with a Labour regional council and it is estimated that its collection rate in 1991-92, in general terms, will be the same as, or higher than, in the current year.

I emphasise to the Committee the importance of the rebate scheme, under which more than 1 million people in Scotland benefit. Opposition Members have suggested that many people have serious debt problems. The House is entitled to ask, "Whose fault is that?" It is not the fault of Opposition spokesmen, but it is in large measure the fault of the Scottish National party Members and some Labour Members because there has undoubtedly been a cynical exercise in misleading people about non-payment, which has had two effects. First, it has resulted in a tide of

[Mr. Stewart]

outrage among decent people who have paid at having to pay a surcharge to subsidise those who have not, but could afford to do so. That tide of outrage sweeps across people of all political persuasions. Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, the campaign may have misled people and encouraged them to get into serious debt.

That serious responsibility lies on the shoulders of those Scottish National party Members who have advocated non-payment, many of whom continue to do so. I shall not intrude on the private grief of the SNP over non-payment after the conference at the weekend where, I understand, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) was described as avoiding calamity by 27 votes.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: No, I shall not. We shall wait to see whether calamity arrives.

The Bill is about the present system, and 1991-92. I ask the House to reject the amendments and send, not the Opposition's message to the people, but a different message—that the Bill is generous—*[Interruption.]* Of course it is—that is why Opposition Members did not vote against it on Second Reading.

The Bill reduces the costs for everyone. The average charge in England will be £250—20 per cent. of that is less than £1 a week.

People in Scotland have been misled by the non-payment campaign. For 1991-92, the Bill gives substantial help to everyone in paying their personal community charge. Therefore, let everyone make his or her contribution.

Mr. Maxton: What we have just heard is the rearguard action of the Scottish Office fighting to retain whatever last elements of the poll tax it can salvage from the wreckage around it. It has been fighting that campaign in the review during the past few months. We only have to listen to the leaks coming from the Scottish Office, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for the Environment. I gather that there is an investigation into who is doing the leaking. Those involved have only to stand in front of a mirror to see who has been doing the leaking during the past few weeks. We have seen the last remnants of that fight in the Minister's speech.

The Government have no give, no take, no generosity and no ability to see that the poor are being hit. That is what is so desperately wrong with the Government—they cannot, with any dignity, admit their previous mistakes and say, "We were wrong, we are sorry and we will now put it right." This is the chance for those Conservative Members who have a sense of responsibility to the poorest in our society—two of whom have courageously continued to speak their minds against the poll tax tonight—to join us in the Lobby to vote for the amendments.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 184, Noes 284.

Division No. 105] **[1 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.

Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ys)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 1, line 5, leave out from 'amount' to end of line 15 and insert

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

'payable in respect of the year 1991-92 by a person to whom regulations made in accordance with subsection (2A) below apply shall from the relevant day be reduced by such amount as may be determined under those regulations.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 23, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'(2A) Regulations made under subsection (6) below may make such provision for the application of additional rebates as the Secretary of State may consider appropriate in respect of persons not entitled before the passing of this Act to a rebate of 80 per cent. of a personal community charge.'.

No. 27, in page 3, line 14, leave out from first 'amount' to end of line 19 and insert

'payable in respect of the year 1991-92 by a person to whom regulations made in accordance with subsection (2A) below apply shall from the relevant day be reduced by such an amount as may be determined under those regulations.'.

No. 34, in page 3, line 24, at end insert—

'(2A) Regulations made under subsection (6) below may make provision for the application of additional rebates as the Secretary of State may consider appropriate in respect of persons not entitled before the passing of this Act to a rebate of 80 per cent. of a personal community charge.'.

Mr. Murphy: I begin by referring to this afternoon's speech by the Secretary of State for the Environment, in which he said that the Bill would provide "direct help" for community charge payers in England and Wales. However, the reduction of £140 is not linked to ability to pay the headline tax. The term "headline tax" is a perpetuation of the local government financial gobbledegook that has developed during the last 10 to 15 years. It does not help us to understand these matters. The fact is that everybody will enjoy this £140 reduction, irrespective of income. It perpetuates the inequality of the poll tax.

Reference was made in the last debate to the £300 million that would have exempted the poorest people from paying the poll tax. However, the Committee decided not to accept the amendment. This series of amendments relates to the introduction of new rebates. About £600 million would reduce the taper on benefit from 15 per cent. to 7·5 per cent. For every £1 that a claimant's income rises above that threshold, 15p of poll tax benefit is lost. If that were to be reduced to 7·5p, a considerable impact on the so-called poverty trap could be made.

During consideration of the Local Government Finance Bill in Standing Committee in 1988, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales will recall, as he too was a member of the Committee, the many references that were made to the fact that the poverty trap creates considerable problems with regard to rebate. Furthermore, the rebate system does not address the problem of the poverty trap—those who do not earn enough to claim benefit and those who earn just too much to be able to claim it. Those people are caught in the middle. If some of the value added tax money could be directed towards increasing the new rebates and alleviating such problems, many thousands of people in Wales and tens of thousands of people in the United Kingdom would be better off.

The last debate referred to Scottish matters. Therefore, I intend to deal with the rebate system as it applies in the Principality. Incomes in Wales are much lower than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. We are at the bottom of the British earnings league. In Wales, 40 per cent. of the people earn less than the European so-called decency threshold. In the Principality, 35,000 men and 70,000 women earn less than £130 a week.

We all know that the additional 2·5 per cent. value added tax will hit hardest those people who are on low incomes. In the Cynon Valley, Merthyr and Blaenau Gwent there are some of the poorest people in the United Kingdom. They will be affected very severely indeed by this extra burden. The editorial in the *Western Mail* of the day after Budget day said that, in Wales, the £140 would soon disappear because of extra VAT.

1.15 am

The people of Wales can see through the trick of switching from one form of tax to another. Those who wish to improve their properties will not be helped. The Rhymney Valley district council informed us recently that many people currently in receipt of rebates will not benefit from the cut of £140 in the so-called headline tax, as a large number of them undoubtedly expect to do. For instance, a single old-age pensioner will receive only about £27. In New Tredegar, a single person on income support will get just over £7. Literally thousands of people in Wales who are in receipt of benefits will get nothing like the £140 that has been trumpeted from the rooftops during the past few days.

There is another strange consequence. People in Wales who are currently eligible for grants to carry out minor repairs and improvements to their properties will no longer be eligible. That will hit a tremendous number of people in the valleys—people who have already been hit by changes in the way in which grants are means-tested. Those two disadvantages are being combined, even if unwittingly. In many parts of Wales, there will be considerable disharmony as a direct consequence of this change.

These are just two examples of the anomalies and injustices that will result from this measure.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that a third example of the rediculousness of this proposal is that the Secretary of State for Wales will pay no poll tax in respect of his flat in the Crown buildings in Cathays park, in Cardiff? Why, when so many people will not get the benefit that they expect from this measure that is being trumpeted tonight, should the Secretary of State not have to pay poll tax?

Mr. Murphy: I could give examples of that kind of thing in many parts of the Principality. Blanket relief of £140 is daft. People up and down the Principality who earn many tens of thousands of pounds will get the same relief as people on average incomes. My hon. Friend's point is very valid.

The introduction of the community charge reduction scheme—the so-called transitional relief—has produced anomalies throughout Wales. The system in the Principality is different from that in England. In certain communities, people are divided, and considerable bitterness has been created. Some people on very low incomes get no benefit at all by way of transitional relief. That problem will be exacerbated by the fact that the rebate of £140 will apply throughout the Principality. Our experience in Neath and elsewhere during the past two weeks shows that this panic measure has not been well received in Wales.

This is an ill-thought-out, badly drafted Bill, which certainly does not address the main issues. There should have been proper consultation with Welsh local authorities before the details of the scheme were finalised.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) has made some important points which apply to many parts of Wales. The Bill will result in many anomalies. However, I disagree with him when he says that the Bill is not going down well in Wales. We would be misleading ourselves if we believed that the £140 reduction in bills was not going down well. People always welcome a reduction in bills of that sort.

We would not deny the average figure of £95 in Wales, but we would like to see the money raised in an equitable way, and we advocate a local income tax. I realise that there are different views on this within parties as well as across parties, but a local income tax would overcome the anomalies of which the hon. Gentleman spoke, which certainly need to be overcome in some way.

In some areas the rebates are significant while next door they are next to nothing. People in the same circumstances in adjacent communities such as Felinheli and Llanddeiniolen in my constituency have a difference of £50 to £60 in their community charge. That is not a sensible way to work things out in the long term. One needs to find a formula which takes into account people's abilities to pay.

Our previous debate dealt with the 20 per cent. threshold. A large number of people could have been exempted if we had done away with that threshold, but even so, there would still have been the question of gradation. The Government have a formula which gives rough justice. They need to work on that or the anomalies will cause bureaucratic and administrative difficulties as well as penalising the families concerned and creating much work and heartache in the next year or two through to 1993.

For that reason, the Bill should be amended. The wording of the amendments appeals to me because it allows the Secretary of State to bring forward regulations to cope with some of the problems as they arise. It is well worth building in such amendments to give the Secretary of State the sort of powers that he may well find himself needing to overcome the anomalies in the rough justice Bill being rushed through Parliament tonight.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I rise to draw to the attention of the House the nonsenses that will occur as a consequence of the Bill. They stem from the fundamental principle of the poll tax—the notion that a citizen is accountable only if he pays some sort of tax. For generations, in Budget after Budget, Chancellors have tried to take people out of taxation by raising personal allowances, age reliefs, and so on. That has not made them any less responsible or less accountable or made the system less democratic. It has been a sensible administrative arrangement not to drag people into marginal forms of taxation.

Yet the poll tax did just that—it dragged a host of people into paying the most marginal sums of money possible. Now, having introduced the £140 reduction, we shall have an absurd situation in which some people will end up paying as little as £10 or £12 per year. The notion that someone who is paying such a sum is still accountable—still part of a democracy, and a responsible citizen who will worry about how he votes because he is paying £12 a year—makes nonsense of the idea of any relationship between paying tax and being a responsible citizen. Hundreds of thousands of people do not pay national taxation; they have been taken out of the system, justifiably, because of their low incomes. Those people are no less accountable, no less responsible and no less democratic than anyone else.

In my constituency, borough treasurers—or directors of finance, as they are now called—will have to issue new bills for what could well be £12; the cost of billing people in the area could well be £13 per person. What is the point? Will that somehow reinforce the concept of accountability and democracy? The nonsense of the poll tax has already been laid bare by the Government's pathetic attempts to correct the anomalies, and to remove the anger and resentment that they have caused. If we achieve nothing else by constantly voting against the Government's proposals, we shall continue to reveal the stark absurdity of the idea that people must still pay a marginal tax—20 per cent. of the total—to be responsible citizens.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I fully endorse what has been said by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), but I should like to add something about owners of second homes. They will receive double relief, in the form of £140 on each home. In Wales, tens of thousands of second-home owners will benefit in that way. Single poll tax payers who have been involved in a multiplier of two will often benefit more than some of the poorest people in Wales, and I do not think that that is fair. Does the Minister think that it is? I want a straightforward answer. In my view, it discriminates in favour of some of the wealthiest people in our society.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Anyone listening to what Opposition Members have said would imagine that community charge bills in Wales are the highest in the United Kingdom rather than the lowest. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) did not congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on securing for Wales the most generous settlement that any Secretary of State for Wales has ever achieved. Although, from the start, Welsh community charge bills were £100 or more lower than those in England, my right hon. Friend managed to achieve the full £140 reduction.

The hon. Member for Torfaen is usually very generous. He might have acknowledged that achievement, which means that the £260 headline figure that would have been Wales's community charge in the coming year will be reduced to £120 after the £140 reduction. The reduction will bring down the average bill in Wales to £95. Surely no one could consider that a matter for criticism; surely it is a matter for praise. The hon. Member for Torfaen is criticising my right hon. Friend unfairly.

Mr. Murphy *rose*——

Mr. Bennett: No, I will not give way. I want to continue on this subject for a minute.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) spoke of bills of £12 or £13. Strangely, he seemed to be suggesting that we should not have reduced the bills by so much. We should note that. The fact that we have reduced the charge to such an extent means that some authorities will have such small sums to collect that it

[Mr. Bennett]

would be uneconomic to send out bills. We have made it clear tonight, as we did yesterday, that, if it is uneconomic to collect the charge because of the cost of billing, it is up to the local authority to talk to the district auditor to see whether it needs to collect the money. I hope that that answers the point made by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfill and Rhymney.

Mr. Rowlands: If the citizen does not receive a bill, does that make him less accountable or less democratic?

1.30 am

Mr. Bennett: I did not quite understand the hon. Gentleman's point about accountable citizens. I thought that the whole purpose of the community charge and of the principle that most people should make a contribution was to make the authorities accountable. We are not talking about the citizens. We are talking about making the authorities accountable. The principle that most people should make a contribution towards the services about which they have a vote and which they receive was generally acceptable. The problem with the community charge has been the outrageous charges made by some authorities, especially those in inner London such as Lambeth, which would have sent out a bill for £595 for the coming year if it had not been reduced.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman knows, because he has employed it himself, that the argument is that, if all the people in a local authority area pay something, they are far more aware of the level of services that are provided and their cost. The Minister hoped that, if people made a contribution, they would influence elections to local authorities. That was, as the Minister has said, a way in which to make people more responsible. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was correct to say that that was one of the original intentions of the poll tax.

Mr. Bennett: The community charge was a way to ensure that local authorities were more responsive to the wishes of the citizens. We have clear evidence from the results in Wandsworth and Westminster in May 1990 that that happened.

It is also important to note the remarks of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey). He complained that those who pay two standard community charges would get the reduction. They will get a £280 reduction. He would be the first to write to complain to the Welsh Office if his constituents who are forced to pay two standard community charges did not get that reduction. It is a typical Liberal Democrat ploy to try to have it both ways. It seems fair that people who pay two standard community charges, on top of their personal charge elsewhere, are as entitled to the reduction of £140 as anybody else in society.

The hon. Member for Torfaen talked about the benefits scheme. The benefits scheme in Wales is exactly the same as that operating elsewhere in Great Britain. In so far as earnings in Wales are lower than in other parts of England, that is not the point of the benefit scheme. What is relevant is that Welsh charge payers will be treated in exactly the same way as those in England who face similar charges and who are on similar incomes. There is no Welsh dimension in the matter. The system is exactly the same for people in Wales as it is for those in England.

Mention was also made of the separate scheme that applies in Wales with regard to the community charge reduction scheme. It may benefit hon. Members if I explain the basis for the scheme in the coming year. The average 1989-90 rate bill in a community area has been compared with the actual 1990-91 charge. If the 1989-90 bill is exceeded by £37 in 1990-91, relief is given through the community charge reduction scheme to everybody who lives in that community council area. That is unaffected by the 1991-92 reduction.

The amendments are therefore not acceptable to us. They are designed to remove from the Bill the general reduction in headline community charges and to substitute for it a requirement that the Secretary of State should make regulations, in effect applying the resources saved to improving the community charge benefit scheme for those charge payers with incomes above income support level.

Mr. Wigley: I wanted some clarification in case, at this early hour of the morning, I had misunderstood what the Minister was saying. Is he saying that, where there is a community charge reduction, as is applicable in Wales, of, for example, £60, people benefiting from that would benefit from the £60 and from the £140, and so might benefit by up to £200? The net figure left would then be about £50. The Minister spoke about a comparison between the poll tax for the coming year and the figure for 1989. Is the Minister making that comparison before or after taking the community charge benefit into account? That makes a significant difference.

Mr. Bennett: Let me explain exactly how it is done. One starts off with a headline charge of £250, less the £140, which brings it down to £110. One then deducts the community charge reduction scheme entitlement, which might be £40, and that brings the charge down to £70. After that, the community charge benefit for the individual is considered. That is how it is done in Wales.

Mr. Wigley: There will be no change?

Mr. Bennett: In that sense, we shall continue to operate as we have in past.

Although I understand the Opposition's arguments in support of the amendments, I do not, of course, accept them. They would emasculate the Bill. Our purpose in proposing a general reduction in community charges is to give charge payers the benefit of switching a part of the burden which at present falls on them to national taxation. Those who are eligible for community charge benefit will get a proportionate reduction in the amount that they pay.

The effect of applying the resources that we propose to use to hold down charges generally to improve the benefit scheme would be to extend the taper right up the income scale. Hon. Members will be able to judge the effect if I say that the cost of the community charge benefit in the current year for the entire United Kingdom is in the region of £1 billion, which assists 10 million charge payers. If all the £4·3 billion net cost of the measures that we have announced were applied to improving the benefit scheme, many millions more would qualify for benefit and the situation would become extremely complicated and

expensive. That would leave less money available for distribution, as it would be swallowed up in extra administrative costs.

How much better, therefore, to take the course that we propose, of reducing headline charges throughout Great Britain, and improving the community charge reduction scheme in England and Scotland, so that all charge payers will pay less, including those who are eligible for community charge benefit.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) *rose*——

Mr. Bennett: I have finished, so the hon. Gentleman can make a speech.

Mr. Griffiths: I did not intend to make a speech, but wanted to ask the Minister a question. Perhaps he will take the opportunity later to answer it.

At the beginning of his speech, the Minister emphasised that we should all be grateful that the £140 flat rate relief will be applied in Wales on top of the other benefits that already accrue, which try to minimise the damage inflicted on people by the poll tax. That generous money to be given to the people will be taken from them in the first place through the additional 2·5 per cent. on VAT.

The Minister has told us about the great things that have been achieved for the people of Wales. Can he tell us exactly how much the flat rate relief will be and how much the Treasury expects to gather from Wales as a result of the increase in VAT? It would be interesting to know the relevant figures to assess whether the people will enjoy any benefit or whether, as the *Financial Times* said the day after the announcement, the electorate are being bribed with their own money.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Minister was rather ungracious when he accused my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) of not complimenting the Secretary of State.

One could also accuse the Minister of ungraciousness, because we are a little puzzled that low or nil community charges in Wales are not mentioned. Garw valley has set a nil community charge, but all we have heard about is Wandsworth and its prudent local authority. A low community charge in Wales is credited not to the prudence of a local authority, but to the Secretary of State. The Government should pay tribute to the good sense that Welsh local authorities have displayed over the years.

The other problem that has been skated over during the debate, and that will cause great furore when the bills finally arrive, is the foolish decision to have a different transitional system in Wales. It will then become apparent that, with the present reductions, the difference between neighbours will be greater proportionally than it was originally. For reasons best known to themselves, officials at the Welsh Office decided to give the benefit not to individuals but to areas. There is rough justice in that decision if the area is homogeneous—all a valley area, or all a rural area—but it becomes distorted in areas that are a mixture of urban and rural, as in my constituency.

What happens to the arithmetic then is that, because the old farmsteads and cottages in the country areas were de-rated and had low ratable values, when officials studied rates in farming areas, they found that they were low. As a result, in the rural wards in my constituency, which are some of the most prosperous, virtually everyone receives a handsome rebate, but in council estates in the urban areas, which are the poorest, people receive no rebates.

I know of dramatic examples where the difference between the charges for people in streets of identical houses is £50. With the new lower rate of community charge, that difference will become even more marked.

A time bomb is ticking under the Welsh Office, and Ministers will discover the ferocity of the voters' feelings in the election. Voters will put up with a great deal—with high charges and all the nonsense and waste of Government—but they will not put up with unfairness. The system as it operates in Newport East, Newport West and many other constituencies in Wales is grossly unfair.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I shall briefly answer the extra remarks that have been made. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) referred to the Secretary of State and asked why there had been no praise for Welsh local authorities. The reason why local authorities have such low charges in Wales is entirely due to the fact that the percentage that is given by the Welsh Office in aggregate external finance in the coming year will be 92 per cent. of their total expenditure. If it were left to local authorities, charges would be much lower.

Wandsworth did not get the sort of aggregate external finance that is being given by the Welsh Office to local government in Wales. If one studies the figures for external financing of Wandsworth, and compares it with those for Lambeth, Hackney, Manchester and Tower Hamlets, one will find that they all received more than Wandsworth.

A remark was made about VAT and the cost to the Exchequer. However, a couple who are receiving £280 would have to spend £13,000 on VAT-rated goods in the coming year before they were out of pocket. That is the difference.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No. We could go on all night.

Mr. Banks: We cannot—we can only go on until half past two.

Mr. Bennett: Yes, but there are other debates that hon. Members want to take part in.

Hon. Members also referred to the transitional relief scheme, which is now the community charge reduction scheme in Wales, and said that it was a foolish decision. I find that strange when, only last year, local authority associations were applauding the Government for having a separate system in Wales; that meant that there were no administration costs, because all the money was diverted straight to the community charge payer.

Last year, community charge payers in Wales benefited to the tune of £20 million. This year, due to the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in discussions with the Treasury, that will increase to £62 million, which means that two thirds of the people of Wales will receive a community charge reduction in their benefit this year, and 612 out of 865 communities will benefit.

I accept that there is an element of rough justice in that, but we also accept that it means that all the money that was available for the reduction scheme will be sent direct to the charge payers and none will be swallowed up in administration. The fact that we gave a much larger percentage of our local government expenditure finance from the centre—92 per cent.—that the scheme was devoid

[Mr. Bennett]

of any administration costs and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided upon a £140 reduction for Wales, as well as for England, are all measures that the people of Wales recognise. They are grateful for the fact that the Secretary of State has fought so hard for Wales and has achieved such a magnificent result.

Mr. Murphy: The Bill would not be emasculated if the Government accepted the amendments. Seeking to ensure that people are taken out of the poverty trap is by no means a bad idea.

On the issue of transitional relief, the Minister is now aware that the local authority associations in Wales have changed their minds about the value of the scheme and realise the anomalies that my hon. Friends have outlined. The most interesting part of the Minister's speech was his unlikely use of the word "congratulate", when he said that we should congratulate the Government on what has happened.

Do we congratulate the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends on introducing the tax in Wales in the first place? Do we congratulate them on squandering £10 million to set it up and an extra £10 million to administer it? Do we congratulate them on having £80 million-worth of sweetners that would have been totally unnecessary if the tax had been a decent one in the first place? Do we congratulate them on the fact that local authorities in Wales will have to raise, by way of loans, at least £100 million in the next few months to overcome their cash flow problems, and on the fact that £1 million of that will be necessary to repay the debt and to administer what has happened?

There is no case for congratulation whatsoever in connection with the poll tax in Wales. Indeed, the people of Wales can see through all this, which will be one of the main reasons why the Government will be turfed out throughout the United Kingdom, and especially in the Principality, at the forthcoming general election.

Amendment negatived.

1.45 am

Mr. O'Brien: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 1, line 5, leave out from 'amount' to second 'for' in line 7 and insert

'payable by any person after allowance for any rebate or other reduction in respect of a personal community charge'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 26, in clause 3, page 3, line 14, leave out from first 'amount' to 'the' in line 15 and insert

'payable by any person after allowance for any rebate or other reduction in respect of a personal community charge for'.

No. 30, in clause 3, page 3, line 17, leave out 'authority is' and insert

'charge is in respect of'.

No. 31, in clause 3, page 3, line 18, leave out 'authority is' and insert

'charge is in respect of'.

No. 46, in clause 3, page 3, line 19, leave out 'authority is' and insert

'charge is in respect of'.

Mr. O'Brien: It is apt that we should be discussing these amendments following the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales.

If amendment No. 14 is passed, clause 1 would read

"The amount payable by any person after allowance for any rebate or other reduction in respect of a personal community charge for the 1991 financial year shall, by virtue of this section, be reduced by £140 or such lesser sum as will reduce the amount to £0."

The Minister said that, because of the work of the Secretary of State for Wales, poll tax payers in the Principality are to be granted the benefit of the £140 reduction in addition to the other benefits to which people might be entitled because of their circumstances. We have been advised that they will receive the best of all worlds.

The amendment seeks to ensure that the same principle and the same rebates apply to the rest of the United Kingdom. Although Ministers and Conservative Members voted to reject the amendment that was so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), it is difficult to understand how they can reject this amendment because it is a levelling-up exercise. We therefore seek the support of Conservative Members if they believe in fairness and equality between poll tax payers throughout the United Kingdom. We have been told more than once that there will be some benefit for people who are paying 20 per cent. of their poll tax under the present system. If the amendment were accepted, it would ensure that people on income support, those on low income and those on low fixed pensions would benefit considerably. The amendment would ensure fairness for everyone paying poll tax.

I call on Conservative Members to have due regard for the principles embodied in amendment No. 14. In view of the points made in the debate on the previous set of amendments, it is difficult to see why the Minister could not accept the amendment and agree to fairness applying throughout the United Kingdom. Therefore, I appeal to the House to accept the amendment.

Mr. Tony Banks: As no one else wishes to speak, I may as well put in my fourpenn'orth. This set of amendments is similar to a set which we debated earlier. It highlights the position of those who will not get the £140 reduction in their poll tax but only £28 because they pay only 20 per cent. I could have voted against the whole Bill with a partially easy conscience on the grounds that about 41,000 people in my borough will not get a reduction of £140 but will get only £28 although they will have to pay the full 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT. That is grossly unfair.

I tried to get in on the chirpy little Under-Secretary of State for Wales when he said that the beneficiaries would have to spend something like £13,000 on VAT-charged goods and services before they ran out of the credit that they had received through the lower poll tax. That might apply to someone who was paying the full poll tax and getting the full rebate, but not to those getting the £28 reduction.

The point that I wanted to make to the Minister, and which I am sure he would have accepted in his usual fair, impartial and objective fashion, was that someone paying only 20 per cent. of the poll tax and getting the £28 reduction would, after spending £1,100 on VAT-charged goods and services, be losing the value of the £28 reduction. The Treasury would then be making a profit.

If we were to add all the figures, I suspect that we would find that the Treasury will make a profit out of the whole damned thing anyway. It will depend on the resurgence in retail sales and services. I should not be surprised if the

Government got back more in the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT than the £4·3 billion that they are paying out to bring the poll tax down by £140.

The 40,000 people in my constituency and many hundreds of thousands in Wales and the rest of the country who are on income support and who are paying 20 per cent. of the poll tax will find themselves out of pocket because of the Government's proposal. That is why I could fairly easily have voted against the Bill. The Secretary of State said earlier that there is no VAT on essential things like food. That is true at the moment, but pressures are building up for us to levy VAT on food. That will put the people at the lowest level of income in real trouble.

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is no VAT on most basic foods, but VAT is levied on foods which especially the children of poor families buy, such as crisps, sweets and lemonade.

Mr. Banks: I accept that point. Many kids in low-income families subsist on the unhealthy diet that my hon. Friend has described. That is a double tragedy for them, but it has to be taken into account.

The figures provided by the Library show that the poorest 10 per cent. spend 9·2 per cent. of their income on VAT-charged goods and services, while the richest 10 per cent. spend only 5·7 per cent. of their income on such goods and services. Once again, this measure falls disproportionately on the poorest people. The Minister proposes a regressive tax, so we cannot be grateful to him for the formula that is being devised.

I hope that the Minister will see just how unfair the measure is. I hope that he appreciates that among all the inequalities of the poll tax, the 20 per cent. charge for the poorest people in our communities is the most invidious of all. He did not accept the earlier amendments to deal with that, but perhaps he will change his mind. Changing their minds seems to be something that the Government do as regularly as they change their underpants—or, looking at some of them, perhaps even more regularly.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The 20 per cent. minimum payment should certainly be removed. If not, some of the exemptions in the poll tax legislation will be removed. Some people who were exempt will now have to pay extra VAT. Some of them may be able to afford to pay more. For some peculiar reason, the overseas forces do not pay the poll tax but will have to pay the extra VAT. Diplomats, who could presumably afford it, do not pay the poll tax and nor do people in prison, unless they are in prison for non-payment of the poll tax.

Some groups of people deserve to be exempt from the poll tax but will have to pay the extra VAT. They include groups such as tramps and vagrants, who presumably sometimes spend money on VAT-rated goods. The Government finally agreed to make monks and nuns exempt, on the grounds that they took vows of poverty. Some may take vows of poverty but others have poverty thrust upon them, especially by the actions of the Government. The same principle that applied to monks and nuns should have applied to other groups.

One group worthy of consideration is the severely mentally handicapped. They are excluded from the poll tax but will pay full VAT. Apart from monks and nuns, the groups that I have mentioned were excluded because they were also excluded from electoral registration. The quaint principle of accountability is the fault in the measure which led to the anomaly. The severely physically handicapped, who might be in as poor circumstances as the severely mentally handicapped, need as much money and resources spent on them and as much assistance. Therefore, they have good grounds of hardship and need for social provision to be exempted. Yet they are not excluded, although the severely mentally handicapped are. The difference is in relation to electoral registration.

Yet the severely mentally handicapped will still be first to pay not only the VAT but, when we move towards the new legislation, presumably the new property tax. We do not know whether the new poll tax amount will be based on the principles of the existing poll tax or whether son of poll tax will be based on a fresh provision and the severely mentally handicapped will come within the exemptions in that legislation.

Mr. Maxton: If a physically handicapped person lives in his own house and tries to look after himself, he has to pay the poll tax, but if he is in a long-stay hospital or home he does not have to pay it.

Mr. Barnes: In addition to that, severely handicapped people have to pay the full VAT. There is nothing in the Bill to tackle that problem, so we are bound to be concerned lest those who were not paying anything previously are called on to pay under the Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend described monks and nuns as deserving cases who are exempt from paying the poll tax. Considering that they vote and use local authority services, why are they exempted?

Mr. Barnes: Various categories of people were added as the poll tax legislation proceeded through Parliament. The lobby in favour of monks and nuns pointed out that they took vows of poverty and should be excluded. The exemption crept in and cut across the principle that it had to be related to the electoral register. An interesting piece of legislation, the Caldey Island Act 1990, linked the electoral register and the poll tax register. It was discovered that on Caldey island there were monks and fishermen who were not on the electoral register. Many of them were not on the poll tax register either, so a special measure had to be introduced to sort matters out.

I recall that the Minister missed the boat one evening when the Caldey Island Bill, as it then was, came before the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): He failed to turn up?

Mr. Barnes: He missed the boat, although it was probably outside the door.

Mr. Tony Banks: Another bit of monkey business.

Mr. Barnes: There are increasing indications, from the Home Office circulars, remarks by electoral registration officers, the Caldey Island Act and other measures, that there is an intricate link between electoral registration and poll tax, and it must go.

Scottish Ministers say, "All must pay the poll tax," while Welsh and English Ministers say, "Most must pay the poll tax." They must get that sorted out. Only when we get rid of the principle on which the poll tax is based shall we overcome some of the many social problems of which my hon. Friends have spoken.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I never cease to wonder at

[Mr. Robert Key]

the chirpiness of debates at this time of night, particularly the chirpiness of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). It is a pleasure to have him with us at this late hour. It is also a pleasure for me to be in the company again of the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). About 14 hours ago, he and I were debating upstairs a rating issue which had everything to do with double counting. In a sense, we are also discussing a problem of double counting here.

The hon. Member for Normanton opened by saying that he was interested in extending the fairness and equality of the system. I am a bit puzzled by his suggestion that the amendments level up the English position to that in Wales. The amendments would mean that the £140 reduction would apply not to the headline charge but to the amount of liability of the charge payer. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales has just explained, the £140 reduction in Wales applies to the headline charge, just as it does in England.

I think that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West understands the amendments and asked who would benefit from the reduction that we have introduced. We have always made it clear that charges everywhere will be reduced by £140, except where the original charge set is less than £140, as in Wandsworth, where the charge will be reduced to zero. The charge set by the authority is being reduced, and where a charge payer pays that charge, the amount that he pays will be reduced by £140. Where a charge payer pays only a proportion of that charge, the reduction in the amount that he pays will be a proportion of £140. It is a complete misrepresentation to present that system as meaning that those charge payers are losing out.

Mr. Harry Barnes: They lose out compared with people who already gain under the poll tax. In Derbyshire, some people have gained considerable amounts of money. The authority has been poll tax capped, so they have gained another £55, and now they are to gain another £140. Some people are doing very well, but those at the other end are doing desperately badly.

Mr. Key: I suppose that that partly explains the problem that Members such as the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) have with any income tax cuts, because the same is true there. The more someone earns, the more income tax he pays, and the more he benefits from any reduction. I accept that point—it depends which end of the telescope one looks through.

Mr. Battle *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Key: I must get on, because I must answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, and I shall certainly not give way to an hon. Member who has not bothered to be here for the debate.

The amendments' purpose is to provide that the reduction of £140 in the community charge effected by the Bill is made, not from the headline charge, as the Government intend, but from the liability of each charge payer, after relief under the community charge reduction scheme and community charge benefit has been calculated. The net result would be that a substantial number of charge payers would pay nothing in 1991-92.

The Bill's purpose is to reduce headline charges. It follows from our decision to shift a substantial part of the burden currently borne by the community charge payer to the national taxpayer. It is not the Bill's aim to ensure that all charge payers should pay £140 less than would otherwise have been the case. The Bill provides generous relief. Under the community charge reduction scheme we have provided relief for former ratepayers who had been especially affected by the move to the community charge. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities announced substantial improvements to the scheme. For those charge payers on low incomes we have also provided community charge benefit. It is perfectly reasonable that eligibility for relief under the reduction scheme and for benefit should be calculated after, not before, the deduction of £140.

Mr. Banks: I have one simple question at eight minutes past two in the morning: who is paying for the services that are being received by the people of Wandsworth? It clearly is not the people of Wandsworth.

Mr. Key: It is being paid for by taxpayers, the hon. Gentleman's constituents, my constituents and, above all, the residents of Wandsworth who, over many years, have invested in their local government services.

The amendment would exempt not just 20 per centers, as they have been called, but many more people who fall into a category above that benefit. The important factor is that, in the past, we have taken too much taxation locally, and we are now redressing the balance. As we have said, our aim is to achieve average charges of about £175.

The amendment is not justified. The Bill, with the community charge reduction scheme and community charge benefit, form a generous and substantial package which will reduce the average charge payable next year to less than £175. I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. O'Brien: I asked the Minister to bring about equality between poll tax payers in the Principality of Wales and those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales said that a person in Wales who receives the benefit of the community charge reduction scheme could also receive transitional benefit and the £140 relief. If people in the English counties and the metropolitan areas receive the benefit of the community charge reduction scheme and transitional relief, why should they not also have the benefit of the £140? The bottom line would be the same.

The Minister has not convinced anyone that there should not be special consideraton for people who pay 20 per cent. of the charge. People who deserve the largest slice of the £4·5 billion will not get it, and the amendment seeks to rectify that. The people who should benefit most from that money are those who are on income support. The Minister did not address that, and I ask him to reconsider. Instead of appealing to the Committee to reject the amendment, he should tell his hon. Friends to support it, because it would benefit people on low incomes. They should be given fair and full consideration.

Amendment negatived

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 6, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 3, in page, 1, line 10, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 20, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

No. 6, in clause 3, page 3, line 15, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

No. 7, in clause 3, page 3, line 20, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

No. 8, in clause 3, page 3, line 22, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

No. 10, in clause 3, page 4, line 4, after 'personal', insert 'or standard'.

Mr. Beith: I shall be brief, because, in answers to questions that I put to him, the Secretary of State seemed to dispose of the matters that I sought to clarify by tabling this amendment. If the Minister can answer yes to my questions, we can quickly get rid of this group of amendments and move to the next one. I tabled these amendments to establish whether standard community charge will be reduced by £140. Secondly, will multiple standard community charge be reduced by the appropriate multiple of £140? Thirdly, will local authorities be fully reimbursed whether for a single or a multiple charge? The Secretary of State's reply to the last question was, "That is correct." What is the answer now to those questions?

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I am surprised that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) moved this amendment, because his hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) in the debate on an earlier amendment argued against giving standard community charge payers the reduction. Plainly, the Liberal Democrats need to get their act together.

I confirm that the answer to the first and second questions posed by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed is yes. The third question does not apply, because in giving authorities the grant in the first place, no account was taken of standard community charge payers. That was a bonus.

Mr. Beith: Local authorities will find themselves with considerably less money than they thought they had. For example, the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed will have over £200,000 less than it thought it would have. Some other authorities with many second homes in their areas will suddenly find that, because of the reduction in the charges, they will have a great deal less money to meet the cost of services at a time when they can no longer increase their charge to compensate. Will the Minister explain what they are supposed to do?

Mr. Bennett: We did not include in the standard spending assessment the fact that they would have the advantage of charging up the two multipliers on the standard community charge.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister, but he has not resolved the problem. Local authorities cannot now change their budgets. They are obliged to stick to the level of charge minus the amount by which the Bill will reduce it. They cannot now take account of the fact that they will have £250,000 less than they expected. Therefore, the Bill creates a difficulty that it cannot resolve. The Minister has given an answer that is different from that given by the Secretary of State. I asked him whether authorities would be reimbursed, and he said that that was correct. The Minister has one last opportunity to clear up the matter.

Mr. Bennett: They will be reimbursed. The point is that the SSA that was originally calculated included the fact that authorities would get a bonus from the standard community charge multiplier, but they will be reimbursed, so they get it doubly.

Mr. Beith: On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

2.15 am

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page line 1, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) Where the reduction has taken place by virtue of this section, a charging authority shall have the discretion to issue no demands if, in its judgment, the total amount to be collected from the charge payers as a whole is likely to be exceeded by the cost of collecting the charge.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 9, in clause 3, page 3, line 24, at end insert—

'(2A) Where the reduction has taken place by virtue of this section, a local authority shall have the discretion to issue no demands if, in its judgment, the total amount to be collected from the charge payers as a whole is likely to be exceeded by the cost of collecting the charge'.

Mr. Beith: The amendments are intended to make it possible for a local authority to avoid being obliged to issue a community charge demand, even though the amount of money raised by doing so would be less than the cost of collecting it. Because of the circumstances of the Bill, the local authority has no discretion. If the authority had found that, because of the favourable grant, it needed to raise only £2, £3, £10 or £12 by way of poll tax, then it would probably have decided not to levy a poll tax at all. Some authorities will be levying very small poll taxes because of the Bill. A number of authorities, including Westminster, have come to the conclusion that it will cost them more to collect the money than they would obtain from collection. It cannot make sense to waste money in that way, and the Government cannot be encouraging them to do so.

The purpose of the amendments is to avoid such waste. In our debate on the money resolution last night, the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who is so fond of the poll tax, argued that local authorities could ask the district auditor what he thought about this, and if he said, "It's all right, don't worry, I shan't trouble you," they could avoid collecting the amounts involved. That is not a satisfactory basis on which to proceed. The Minister has tipped the wink, the district auditor has given a nod, and the authority does not have to send out the bills.

In a world in which local authorities have found themselves plunged into illegality when they conscientiously engaged in swap deals, one cannot tell local authority treasurers, "Don't worry, you won't get into trouble, I have had a word with the district auditor and he has promised that he will not take you to court." That is not a reasonable basis on which to proceed. Surely Ministers do not want the collection machinery set into motion when less will be raised than the cost of the collection.

[Mr. Beith]

Ministers are apt to say that the cost of collection is only the cost of sending the bills out—that is, the printing, postage and stamp time involved in the distribution of the bills. That is not so. A local authority cannot send out a series of bills without thereby committing itself to using its best efforts to get the money in. That means going beyond the first bill, to the reminder, and right along the road to the bailiffs and court proceedings. The Minister would be the first to admit that it would be an irresponsible local authority which issued a bill without intending to secure payment of that bill by using the powers at its disposal. Ministers would strongly criticise any local authority which sent out bills without any serious intention of collecting the money.

Therefore, I ask the Minister to accept the amendment, unless he can show that there is some other, absolutely clear way in which a local authority, in good faith, judging that the amount to be collected is less than the cost of collecting, can avoid sending out bills.

Mr. Key: One of the problems is the wide variation in efficiency of collection by local authorities. If all local authorities were equally efficient at collection, we should be in a different ball game, but there is a huge variation. The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), was right last night when speaking to the money resolution to point out the importance of the auditor. The issue cannot be ducked. If a local authority honestly believes that it would be more expensive to go ahead and collect, it is absolutely right if it decides to approach the auditor to find out whether he agrees, but there are also other ways of approaching the problem.

The amendments are designed to ensure that, when an authority reduces its charges by virtue of the requirements of the Bill, it need not issue charge bills for the residual amounts, if it considers that the cost of collecting them is likely to be greater than the yield of the reduced charges. The amendments are unnecessary. The existing legislation already permits an authority to achieve what they seek. Incidentally, the amendments could also lead to a deficit in an authority's collection fund, which would create a serious problem.

If an authority's charges, after allowing for the reduction required by the Bill, were comparitively small —possibly only a few pounds—it might consider that it was not worth collecting the amounts concerned, thereby saving it the administrative expense of so doing. The correct course then for the authority would not be not to issue bills for the reduced amount, as the amendments propose. That would run the risk of creating a deficit in the collection fund, since estimated income and outgoings would be out of kilter. What such an authority could do would be to reduce its charges to £140 by making an appropriate reduction in its budget—that is, its demand on the collection fund—and then setting substitute charges under section 35 of the Local Government Act 1988, thus passing on the reduction. The provisions of the Bill would then bite by reducing those charges to zero. If one wished to reset the budget downwards, it would simply be a question of giving seven days' notice, having a full council meeting and passing a single resolution. It is not a lengthy affair. That is another reason why I urge the Committee to reject the amendments.

Mr. Beith: The Minister made great play of the deficit in the collection account. I am worried about the deficit in the collection account that will occur if a local authority attempts to collect a charge which yields less than the cost of collecting it. The Minister has set out alternatives. I am not very happy about the idea of a quiet word with the district auditor. It puts local authorities in precisely the position in which they found themselves over swap deals. Which district auditor warned local authorities that they could not safely engage in swap deals without risking the whole system becoming unstitched in the courts which, as the Minister knows full well, it clearly did? The only alternative is that which he has set out—in the few days now available immediately to call a meeting to reduce the charge to £140 and thereby get down to zero.

If a local authority takes that course, I hope that it will not then be criticised by Ministers for delaying the issue of bills. It is an extraordinary fact that local authorities cannot move without being subjected to criticism. On the understanding, nevertheless, that that is a course which they can reasonably take, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. O'Brien: I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State shall within one month of the relevant day lay before Parliament his estimate of the number of persons for whom the actual level of payment for which they are liable in respect of the personal community charge in the 1991 financial year will not be reduced by £140 from the actual payment for which they were liable before the relevant day.'.

We have heard statements about those who will be eligible for the £140 reduction in their poll tax bills due to the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax. There are substantial differences in the numbers of people we are told will receive the benefit. Amendment No. 20 would help to clear up the confusion.

We are asking that the number of people whose poll tax will not be reduced by £140 in the financial year 1991-92 be stated. If those people who are in most urgent need of assistance are to be helped, information of this kind ought to be available. The purpose of our constructive amendment is to improve the Bill in that way. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will accept it.

Mr. Portillo: I do not think that there is any need to amend the Bill in order that this information might be made available. It is always open to hon. Members to seek information in all sorts of ways.

As the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) knows, the £140 comes off the headline community charge figure. If people get less than £140, it will be because they are receiving some other type of help. They may benefit from community charge reduction and thereby pay little more than the amount of their rates bill; or they may be on benefit, in which case they pay perhaps only one fifth, or some larger fraction, of the community charge; or they may be students, in which case they pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge in any case. People may already receive help for any one of those reasons. Those who pay the full charge will get a reduction of £140, and others will get a reduction of less than £140 in what their bills would have been. In the latter case, the figure is less than £140 only because such people already get help in another way against the full charge.

I may be able to help the hon. Gentleman by telling him what the figures are likely to be. We estimate that, as a result of this Bill, 13 million charge payers in England will pay £140 less than they expected to pay. The remaining 22·5 million will also pay less, but the amount of their reduction, on account of the Bill on its own, will be lower than £140. As I have said, the figure will depend on entitlement to relief under the community charge reduction scheme and benefit.

As has been said, 16 million people will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. Of those, about eight million are brought into the scheme as a result of yesterday's announcement. In Scotland, about 2·5 million people will get a reduction of £140. About 1·25 million will get less than that. Of those, 600,000 are on the community charge reduction scheme. In Wales, where the reduction scheme operates on a different basis, the £140 will be received by everyone, except students and those who are on benefit. That comes to almost 600,000, out of the 2·14 million community charge payers in Wales.

I hope that that information is helpful to the Committee. It certainly obviates any need to amend the Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: We should point out to the Minister that the statement that he made on Monday evening in the debate on the money resolution has caused havoc to local authority administration, computer software and billing proposals. The Government cannot have realised, and certainly the Department of the Environment did not advise them of, the enormity of the changes in what appeared to be a small and inconsequential announcement late on a Monday evening. The results of that could be as large as the difficulties facing local authorities in the process of reassessing and re-billing people under the Bill that we are debating tonight.

Because the figure of 8 million, 16 million, once upon a time 18 million, people who were supposed to be entitled to rebates under the community charge reduction scheme is now in such doubt, it is important that, even at this late hour, as we reach 2.30 am and come, like Cinderella, to the point where the coach turns back into a pumpkin and the white horses turn back into mice—an appropriate analogy——

It being half-past Two o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order yesterday, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded, pursuant to the Order yesterday, to put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the business to be included.*

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Order yesterday, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at to-morrow's sitting, Mr. Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Lords Message relating to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill which may be received shall have been disposed of.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Baltic States

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.32 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The debate arises at an appropriate time, although, judging from the exit of various hon. Members, they are not prepared to listen to the problems of the Baltic states.

This is not the first time that I have applied for such an Adjournment debate, but I use the word "appropriate" because it follows hard upon the heels of a visit paid by the hon. Members for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and myself to the Baltic states between 10 and 15 March. Both those hon. Members hope to intervene briefly before the Minister replies.

All three of us would like to place on record our gratitude to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the way in which it facilitated our visit, and we hope to give an extensive briefing to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the results of our visit and fact-finding mission.

We would also like to place on record our thanks to our hosts in Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn. We all found the visit extremely informative and we were impressed by the fortitude and determination of the people we met there. We were also made acutely aware of the oppression which exists in the three states—physical oppression which we could witness through the presence of tanks and Soviet troops, the economic pressure under which many people exist, and the hidden, but perhaps more insidious, pressures being exerted on those fragile democracies by their larger neighbour, the Soviet Union.

My viewpoint and that of my party is that the west should have no hesitation in recognising the three states as independent in their own right. After all, we never did recognise the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement of 1940 and now we should recognise de facto the decisions being taken by the peoples of those states to declare themselves independent nations.

I want to make six points, all of which arise from our findings on our visit, and all of which are intended to encourage President Gorbachev and other representatives of the Soviet Union to come to the negotiating table and, during that process, to assist the people of those three states in a practical way.

If it is not possible for the British Government—or, indeed, other western Governments—to grant immediate official recognition to the three states, the west should make a clear statement that the Soviet Union is placing obstacles in the way of the Baltic states' work towards independence, and that that contravenes the rights of nations to self-determination under international law.

The Minister will be aware of the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe", completed in November 1990. Page 1 clearly spells out that

"Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law."

By any democratic yardstick, the people of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania have expressed their clear wish to be recognised as independent nations within the community of the world.

The issue should be taken into the international community, given our respect for international law. There

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

are facilities for the Government, through the various international forums, to ensure that the future of the Baltic states is placed firmly on the international agenda. We should also state clearly that technical aid and economic credits are conditional on the Soviet Union's willingness to engage in dialogue and negotiation with the elected Governments of the Baltic republics.

During our visit, it was made clear to us that many people believed that further bloodshed would have occurred following the killings in Vilnius and Riga had the European Community not expressed its willingness to withdraw technical aid at that stage. That willingness should be reiterated. Surely none of us would tolerate circumstances in which people were threatened, and their lives taken, because of their beliefs in their country and their right to have their own Government.

Thirdly, I believe that the states would be helped by the establishment of reciprocal information centres to promote trade and cultural links. That was emphasised by all the members we met. It is clear that the legal status of such centres could be variable, but they could eventually adopt full diplomatic status at the appropriate stage. It would mean a great deal to the three countries if such centres were established.

Fourthly, an attempt is now being made, under the auspices of the Nordic Council, to hold an international conference to deal specifically with the issue of the Baltic states. It is, after all, one of the unresolved questions of the last world war, and such a conference would be extremely helpful. It has been suggested that it should be a parliamentary rather than a governmental conference, but I hope that the British Government will look favourably on the idea. The conference could provide a framework for dialogue between the Baltic states and the Soviet Union, with Denmark and Iceland in particular cast in the role of mediators.

Fifthly, there is the question of practical assistance to the states. That should cover such questions as how we can assist educational institutions such as universities and colleges, how we can help the people to build up a knowledge of legal systems and human rights, how we can help them to build up trade and commerce, to establish communications with the outside world and, indeed, to arrange exchange visits with our Parliament. Many people there want to come here, meet hon. Members and discuss how we operate and what advice we can offer.

It is important that some of the know-how funds established by the Government for the emerging eastern and central European democracies should be earmarked for the Baltic states. We met representatives of all the political parties in the three countries. We must remember that they are talking about what they have called a black hole of democracy. The political parties have to educate people to understand the meaning of differences between political parties and how important it is to exercise a democratic vote. The earmarking of some of the funds would do a great deal to assist those very brave politicians who are trying so hard to establish democracy against a background of overwhelming threat from the Soviet Union.

I hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively to some of my comments. There is a great deal more about which we, as the representatives of Parliament who visited the Baltic states, can talk. However, an Adjournment debate does not give us sufficient time to do so.

2.40 am

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) have the consent of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and of the Minister?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davies: I endorse the analysis of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), who I accompanied with the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) to the Baltic republics, and her suggestions. We were greatly impressed by the enormous sense of the indomitable human spirit that one encounters in the three countries. After 50 years of apparently overwhelming propaganda and the most brutal repression, the determination of the countries to achieve their national independence again, and their pride and patriotism, have been utterly unextinguished and undimmed. We were also impressed by the tremendous human courage displayed by the people in the three countries, especially in Lithuania during the events in January, when the people literally interposed their bodies between Soviet tanks and their Parliament, which is the symbol of their re-emergent democracy.

I know that the Government remain hopeful that Mr. Gorbachev and the Kremlin leadership will begin to negotiate with the republics on moves towards genuine independence. For a host of reasons into which I will not go now, I have little confidence that there is much prospect of such meaningful negotiation beginning in the forseeable future. However, in those circumstances, the right policy is for the Government, by gradual measures, to encourage the three states to expand the area of their de facto independence so that there is a general sense of inexorable movement in the direction that all of us must feel is right.

2.42 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) have the consent of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and of the Minister?

Mr. Douglas Hogg *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Flynn: I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). The story from the visit which haunts me is the one that was told to us by one of the Members of Parliament in Lithuania about her aged parents. She explained to us why she felt so strongly. Like many other people we met there, her parents had spent time in the gulags. They had been robbed of their childhood. When the coup d'etat, which failed, took place in Vilnius, the mother told the father, "This time you must go down. If anyone should die, it should be old people such as you. We need our young people to build the new,

free Lithuania." The picture of that frail 70-year-old man challenging the brute force of the tanks with his stick is powerful.

We saw the free, democratically elected Parliaments. There was an affront to all our values because the Parliaments operate behind brick walls, barricades and armed guards. The threat to them is the alien forces of panzer communism. Sadly, we must now take the view from the news even today that glasnost is in its twilight. We must also acknowledge that the situation in the three countries is not stable.

There is likely to be conflict, and we must look to our own history, to our links with those countries and to the feelings that those countries have towards ours, and we must remember the 50 terrible years in which the flower of the nation has been abused, deported and killed in great numbers and in which the worst of the nation have been elevated to privileged positions. Their language has been degraded, but, despite that, the spirit of those three small nations has survived and is enjoying a new spring. It is possible, however, that that spirit could be trampled down again by the forces of Moscow.

I agree with everything that has been said by the hon. Members for Moray and for Stamford and Spalding. When that conflict comes, we must ensure that we have established links at every level that, if possible, bypasses Moscow. We should establish links on a parliamentary level but also on a non-governmental level which incorporate voluntary and religious groups. We must ensure that those links with the Baltic states are direct. When the new conflict arises, there is no way in which this country and Parliament can remain neutral.

2.45 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Despite the lateness of the hour, I am glad that the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) have raised the question of the Baltic states. I am also grateful to the kind words of the hon. Lady on the briefing and assistance that she received from the Foreign Office—I shall ensure that officials are aware of those kind words.

I should like to take advantage of the debate to outline in general terms the Government's policy towards the Baltic states, as well as to respond to the specific questions that have been posed. It would be helpful if I summarised the Government's policy towards those states and our policy towards the Soviet Union's own policy to the Baltic states.

I should make it clear that the United Kingdom Government have never accepted the legality of the incorporation of the three Baltic states into the Soviet Union. As the hon. Lady said, that was a clear act of aggression, and the three republics were sovereign, independent states at the time of their incorporation.

Although we never recognised as lawful the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the Union, one must accept as a matter of de facto law that the republics are part of the Soviet Union . Although we have recognised that fact, we also assert their right to self-determination. But, if we are realistic about this, we must accept that the right to self-determination can only be effectively achieved through genuine and free negotiation between the Soviet Union and the republics. The outcome will necessarily depend upon those negotiations.

The outcome may be full independence, or some form of autonomy that falls short of that. It is not for us to prescribe or seek to prescribe the outcome of those negotiations. Out interest and duty is to try to secure free and bona fide negotiations between the Soviet Union and the republics. Their purpose must be to try to devise a genuine, consensual and long-lasting solution to the problems that the hon. Lady has outlined.

For about two years up to January 1991, there were grounds for optimism. Genuine elections were held, representative bodies were established, real political freedoms came into existence and there was a real measure of political independence. Then came the killings in January in Latvia and Lithuania, a truly shocking event which the world, the European Community and the United Kingdom in particular rightly condemned in clear language. Those killings threatened to put into reverse much of the improvement that had been secured in east-west relations during the past five years or so.

Perhaps as a result of the condemnations and criticisms which I have just described, the Soviets held back from any continued force. The hon. Lady was kind enough to suggest that it may have been as a result of the action taken by the world community. In any event, the position has achieved a certain rather menacing stability: elected leaders in the Baltic republics are still in power; the bloodshed in Latvia and Lithuania was not repeated in Estonia; and there is some evidence, although not as much as we would like, that the Russians are seeking negotiations.

Mrs. Ewing: I wish that I could share the hon. and learned Gentleman's optimism about the idea that there is evidence that the Soviet Union will enter into negotiations. We found that attempts were being made by all three Parliaments, Presidents and Prime Ministers to open up negotiations. Organisations have been established. Yet time and time again, the Soviet Union has refused to come to the negotiating table. Does he have any evidence to the contrary?

Mr. Hogg: That is why I expressed my remarks in the way I did. I said that there was some evidence, but I went on to say that it was not very persuasive.

There is some evidence—for example, the remarks that President Gorbachev has made from time to time about his willingness to enter into negotiations and also the appointment of the delegations. However, I am not trying to persuade the Chamber that it is very persuasive evidence, and that is why I qualified my remarks.

To summarise the position thus far, our policy is, first, to press the Soviet Government to enter into genuine negotiations with the three Baltic republics with a view to achieving a genuine, consensual, long-term solution to their claims for political self-determination; and secondly, to make it plain to the Soviet Union that, if there is any recurrence of the military policy action that took place in Latvia and Lithuania earlier this year, it will automatically bring into major question any further improvement of the relations between the Soviet Union and the west. Indeed, I do not see how the Soviet Union could look to the west for any sort of assistance in the event of such action taking place.

[Mr. Hogg]

Thirdly, we must try to build up the links and connections that can be developed between the United Kingdom and the Baltic republics. I shall give some examples. Clearly, the visit paid by the three hon. Members who are now in the Chamber is one. That was extremely welcome. We are trying to expand contacts. For example, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister saw representatives of the Baltic republics when he visited Moscow earlier this month. I have seen the Foreign Ministers of the three Baltic republics since I have been in office—in November last year. The British embassy in Moscow has been building up a fairly extensive programme of visits to the Baltic republics. As the hon. Lady may know, the British Council is hoping to establish an English language training centre in Tallinn. There are other examples of these improving contacts that we should like to develop.

The first specific question that the hon. Lady asked was whether one should use the prospect of economic technical assistance from the European Community as a method of ensuring that the Soviet Union enters into negotiations with the Baltic republics. If the Soviet Union were to use force against the Baltic republics, it is incredible to suppose that the European Community programme would survive. In other words, the use of force would cost the Soviet Union the technical aid programme that is available under the EC scheme.

However, it would not be sensible to use the existence of the EC scheme as a lever to bring the Soviet Union into negotiations with the Baltic republics—for two reasons. First, I doubt whether it would be successful. Secondly, there are free-standing reasons that justify the aid programme. After all, it spreads right across the Soviet Union and brings real benefits to its people. It would not be sensible or desirable from the point of view of the Soviet Union broadly defined to withhold that aid merely because it had not entered into negotiations. The policy is to persuade the Soviet Government to enter into negotiations, but we shall not withhold the EC programme as a sanction if they do not. However, we would use it as a sanction if they used military force in the Baltic republics, but one would have to carry one's EC colleagues with one on that.

The hon. Lady also raised the question of a Nordic conference. I must confess that I cannot help the hon. Lady on this because, although I have made earnest and searching inquiries about the Nordic conference, truth to tell, I can find no evidence that there is about to be one. That may be my fault, but I cannot; that being so, I cannot give the commitments for which the hon. Lady has asked. I am sorry not to be of greater assistance in that regard.

I can be more forthcoming about the information centres. The United Kingdom Government have no plans to open information centres in the Baltic republics although, as I have said, we do have plans to extend our contacts. On the other hand, the Baltic republics themselves are extremely welcome to open information centres in the United Kingdom if that is what they wish —although, clearly, such centres would not have any diplomatic status—and my understanding is that they wish to do so.

There has not been any substantial dispersement of the know-how funds to the Soviet Union. Disbursements are likely to begin after 1 April this year, and it is probable that there will be significant projects from the Baltic republics. We would very much welcome that. However, that is not to say that a specific sum is earmarked for the Baltic republics, but I should be extremely disappointed if substantial portions of the funds available did not go to projects emanating from the Baltic republics. Although I do not think that it was under the auspices of the know-how fund, some work has already been done on, for example, port privatisations in Estonia, and developments of small farm agriculture in Latvia and Lithuania.

The hon. Lady also referred to wider and broader contacts being made with the Baltic republics by the United Kingdom and various of our institutions and organisations. I strongly endorse and support what the hon. Lady said. She made a valuable suggestion, and we shall endeavour to find ways of deepening the relationship. I have already mentioned some of the things that we have done and which we shall continue, such as establishing parliamentary, educational, cultural and commercial contacts. They all build a relationship, which is important not only in terms of the relationship itself, but in improving security for the Baltic republics. The hon. Lady's suggestion is to be adopted and applauded.

I hope that I have covered all the points made in the debate. Finally, I should like to thank the hon. Lady once again for raising this important subject. It is our joint misfortune that it should now be 2.59 in the morning.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 27 March 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TAY ROAD BRIDGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Litter

1. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his assessment of progress in respect of the litter problem under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): I am in no doubt that the litter provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which represent the most comprehensive package of measures ever introduced by any British Government to deal with the problem of litter, will lead to a visible improvement in the standard of cleanliness of our streets and open spaces. We will monitor the effectiveness of the legislation when it is all in place, which should be in about three months' time. I welcome the Tidy Britain Group's initiative to hold a national spring clean from 19 to 28 April.

Mr. Shepherd: I welcome warmly the initiative that my hon. Friend mentioned and I appreciate that money has been made available to the Tidy Britain Group to help the national spring clean week. May it go well. Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that, despite the powers provided under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, we still have a profusion of supermarket trolleys littering residential areas, town centres and car parks? Will he knock some heads together among local authorities and supermarket operators so that we get sensible mechanisms for controlling this wretched nuisance?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the further commercial that he has given to national spring clean week. I am anxious that everyone should play a part in helping us not only to clean up the country, but to ensure that it is kept clean. On his second point, the wanderlust of shopping trolleys is a feature of British life which has concerned me for a long time. We had lengthy debates during the Committee stage of the Environmental Protection Bill and I sought to have it included in the Act. Section 99 allows local authorities to collect, store and dispose of abandoned shopping trolleys. As a result of that initiative and now that the law is in place, I am comforted to see that more and more supermarkets are introducing new and ingenious technology to stop the trolleys wandering out of the perimeters of the land owned by the supermarket, although in recent months many of us have seen them end up in streams, waterways and motorways, though not in the fast lane. I am glad to say that the problem is slowly diminishing.

Mr. Win Griffiths: We welcome the Tidy Britain Group week and hope that it will be a success. Will the Government admit that their 23-page code of practice, which introduces 11 category zones with three different types of road category, is a bureaucractic nightmare, made much worse for local authorities by desperate underfunding of all the provisions? The Government allowed about £50 million, but the metropolitan authorities alone reckon that they need £60 million to carry out their duties. Is not this another case of the Government setting desirable objectives, but failing lamentably in administration and finance to carry them out?

Mr. Trippier: No, it is not. The hon. Gentleman is obviously anxious to support the Tidy Britain Group's initiative of a national spring clean week and I welcome that. I remind him and the House that the code of practice, which has statutory backing, was put together not only by the Tidy Britain Group but by the local authority associations. Therefore, they had a hand in ensuring that the code was not a bureaucratic nightmare. The standards that I accept and for which I do not apologise are extremely high and can be met. On the hon. Gentleman's final point, it may be fairer for me to take the political sting out of the argument by comparing two Labour authorities in the north—Leeds, which is remarkably clean, and Manchester, whence I come, which is filthy. The question that the hon. Gentleman should address is how Leeds manages to keep its city clean while Manchester does not. As from next week, when the litter laws will bite, I can assure him that Manchester city will be more often in the dock than out.

Mr. Speaker: May I ask for briefer answers as they seem to be taking a long time.

Land Registers

2. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to consult the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors about the amount of public vacant and derelict land currently listed in the land registers.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): I am considering the RICS response to my Department's recent consultation paper as part of the Government's review of policy relating to vacant public land.

Analysis of land use changes has shown that in the past few years 45 per cent. of all land developed for new housing has been vacant or recycled land in urban areas, and in the south-east the proportion is even higher: 57 per cent. in 1988. We must continue to see that the potential of vacant land in our cities is properly used, to help meet housing need and to stop the unnecessary use of green-field sites.

My officials are currently looking in detail at the Secretary of State's register for London and the south-east to see what potential the sites on it may have for housing use.

Mr. Summerson: My hon. Friend will be aware that much of the impetus in tackling difficult sites comes from a partnership between the private and public sectors. When he next consults the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors will he take a fresh look at the proliferation of Government regulations that are threatening to inhibit the setting up of such partnerships? On that occasion, will he stress the utility of derelict land grant for realising the potential of difficult sites, even in districts of high land value?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his two suggestions. Yes, we shall look at any bureaucratic problems that are in the way of the derelict land grant. The city action teams and task forces that operate in many of the districts involved are there precisely to overcome such problems. On my hon. Friend's second question, £88 million of derelict land grant will be available next year —a useful 20 per cent. increase on the amount available this year.

Mr. Nellist: Just before Christmas the Land Registry opened its records to anyone who wants to inquire about ownership of land or property, subject to a small fee. Does not the Minister think, therefore, that it would be a good idea for his Department to encourage councils and provide the finance to assist them to approach the Land Registry to find out about derelict or unoccupied land or houses so that the hundreds, if not thousands, of houses in every town and city could be taken over by councils and used to ease the housing shortage?

Sir George Young: As the private Member who introduced the Bill on opening up access to the Land Registry, I am grateful for the support that I had from the Opposition. Before the local authorities use the Land Registry for the purpose described by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), perhaps they should look at the empty properties already in their ownership. They should bring them back into use before persecuting people in the private sector.

Mr. Steen: As the economy is picking up, it is clear that more housing will be needed and will be built on land throughout Britain. Does my hon. Friend agree that as there are still 88,000 acres of vacant, derelict, dormant and underused land on the Land Registry, the Government should introduce some private sector involvement to get rid of that land? They should direct developers to develop on that derelict and vacant land before building on green-field sites, particularly in the south and south-east where there is great pressure to destroy more and more of our green and pleasant countryside.

Sir George Young: It is precisely for that reason that I have asked my officials to look specifically at land on the Land Registry in London and the south-east that might be used for housing to see whether we can make faster progress in meeting some of the housing demand in the south-east without impinging on the green fields to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) rightly gave priority.

Community Charge

3. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to abolish the community charge by April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I announced on 21 March the Government's intention to replace the community charge by a new local tax with two essential elements—the number of adults in a household and the value of the property—and that we shall consult on the basis that the new tax could be in place in 1993-94.

Mr. Haynes: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a Secretary of State who is dithering like the Prime Minister. I remember when he wrote on the back of that envelope about his objectives, but he has dithered and jithered and he has not got there. What I want to tell the Secretary of State is——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Ask him a question, please.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware—I will tell him this—that if he does not achieve his objective we shall do it after the next election?

Mr. Heseltine: There is no need for the Opposition to wait that long—they can join us in consulting and help to take the matter forward now.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the labyrinthine proposals put forward by the Labour party in place of the community charge make his own look clear and simple, and that the Opposition's proposals would destroy the privacy and freedom of the individual with a mesh of state control?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes important points which I dare say will be amplified as the House moves to later business. However, she will be encouraged to know that the chairmen of the Association of County Councils and the Association of District Councils have today come out strongly in support of my announcement last week.

Mr. Gould: Is the Secretary of State aware that speculation is reaching fever pitch about some of the fundamental aspects of his two-tax proposal? For instance, is the poll tax element to be a flat rate tax, is the property element to be based on capital values, and what is the balance to be struck between the two? I know that in the current state of confusion and disarray it is difficult for the Secretary of State to offer answers to those simple questions, but may I offer him the possibility of giving us his best answer on any one of them of his own choice?

Mr. Heseltine: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's curiosity. I shall have to ask him to wait for two weeks, but he has kept the country waiting for 10 years.

Competitive Tendering

4. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken with regard to councils which award contracts to their direct service organisations tendering significantly in excess of tenders from outside private contractors.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Under the Local

Government Act 1988, the Secretary of State has sanction powers which he may use if he considers that an authority has failed to comply with the statutory requirements for competitive tendering, including the requirement to avoid anti-competitive behaviour. We have used those sanction powers in the case of 22 local authorities, including some which, in our opinion, have rejected lower-priced external tenders without sound reasons.

Mr. Butler: Is not it disgraceful that a Labour council such as Warrington should award its refuse contract to its direct services organisation despite the fact that its tender was £100,000 in excess of a private tender, and that a Labour council in Halton should award its refuse contract to its direct services organisation despite the fact that its tender was £175,000 above the outside tender? Is not that financial incompetence ripping off the poll tax payer?

Mr. Key: Yes, it is. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the diligence that he has shown on behalf of his constituents. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Lady Blatch, has recently considered the case and agreed that the Department of the Environment should send an official letter to Warrington council saying that the Secretary of State considers that its decision was anti-competitive and that he is minded to use the sanction powers after 1 August 1991.

Council House Rents

5. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extend to Knowsley borough council the same assistance as he has given to the London borough of Ealing to keep down the level of increase of council house rents.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): Any application from Knowsley borough council or from any other authority for a special determination of subsidy would be considered on its own merits.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the Minister agree that the housing subsidy system is ridiculously complex and in a mess, and that the Government's attempts to bring council rents into line with market values have failed dismally, so that in the case of a borough such as Knowsley, which has significantly high rents and a high take-up of housing benefit, the inclusion of the cost of benefits in the calculation for housing subsidy has the effect of increasing those rents?

Mr. Yeo: On the contrary, the housing subsidy system is extraordinarily simple and any difficulties that arise in Knowsley have nothing to do with the Government and everything to do with the incompetence of Knowsley borough council, whose record of housing mismanagement is bad even by the appalling standards of Labour-controlled authorities. On 1 April last year, more than 5 per cent. of Knowsley's housing stock was empty —the seventh worst performance out of 366 housing authorities. Its record of collecting rents was not much better. Last year it was the 28th worst authority out of the 366. Filling those voids and collecting those rents would help its housing revenue account. Instead of criticising the Government, the hon. Gentleman should advise his constituents to vote for a Conservative council on 2 May so that it can start cleaning up the mess, just as the newly elected Ealing Conservative council did last May.

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the answer. Is not the way to keep down the level of rents to make a determined effort to collect them in the first place?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Following our introduction of a ring-fenced housing revenue account last April, there is an enormous incentive for authorities to be efficient. I am glad to say that the vast majority of Conservative councils are responding extremely well.

Mr. George Howarth: I think that the Minister should be aware that many of his successors in that job, of which there have indeed been many, met Knowsley workers and are well aware that, by agreement with the Department, the number of voids are high because they are being held for improvement. Without throwing any bricks at the Minister for Housing and Planning, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), if every authority in the country, irrespective of political control, had been subject to the same arrangements as the Conservative-controlled borough of Ealing, the level of increase in council house rents would have been far smaller throughout the country. The Minister cannot evade that fact. The Government are being highly selective about whom they help and whom they do not help. It will not buy them any votes—certainly not in Knowsley, or in Ealing.

Mr. Yeo: I should explain to the House that my hon. Friend the Minister played no part in discussions held in the Department regarding Ealing borough council—discussions which, incidentally, led to our refusal of Ealing's request for additional subsidy. Ealing faced the problem of inheriting exceptionally difficult conditions from the Labour council in May last year—a projected housing revenue account deficit of £25 million. Even after we allowed the council to bring forward £5 million from 1992-93 into 1991-92—money which will have to be repaid in the following year—its rent increase exceeds the guideline rent increase by more than any other local authority in the country.

Mr. John Marshall: As a former Ealing councillor, may I ask whether my hon. Friend finds it strange that the Labour Front Bench wants the increase to be even greater?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. If it were not for how highly we value his services in this place, I dare say that he would still be doing a valuable job on Ealing borough council.

Irreversible Development

6. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider bringing forward proposals to make irreversible development, carried out without planning consent, a criminal offence.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend considers that the concept of irreversible development, carried out unlawfully, is an unsatisfactory basis for a criminal offence.

Mr. McAvoy: Surely the Minister accepts that this issue concerns both sides of the House, not least his hon. Friend

the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen)? Does he accept that in the case of opencast mining, where the effects are disastrous it should be regarded as a criminal offence?

Sir George Young: Opencast mining is not irreversible. It is relatively easy to infill and make good an area after opencast mining. The hon. Member has not chosen a very good example. We debated the matter at length on an amendment in Standing Committee and at the end of the debate on the amendment, it was withdrawn without a Division.

Mr. Ground: Is it right that planning policy and the expediency of enforcing planning controls have hitherto been matters for local authorities and the Secretary of State, and not for the criminal courts? Do the Government wish to keep it that way?

Sir George Young: My hon. and learned Friend puts the case very well. Those who are concerned with implementing planning legislation—the local government planning Bar and all the authorities concerned apart from district planning officers—agree with my hon. and learned Friend that criminalisation of planning matters is not the best way forward.

House Repossessions

7. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the Building Societies Association to discuss the level of house repossessions.

Sir George Young: I have already discussed with the Building Societies Association and the Council of Mortgage Lenders ways in which repossession can be avoided, and will be meeting the CML again tomorrow. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will also be meeting the CML.

Mr. McMaster: When the Minister next meets the chairman of the Building Societies Association, will he apologise to him and, more importantly, to the millions who are struggling to pay their mortgages as a result of his policy of high interest rates and mortgage misery? What does he intend to do to help the people whom he encouraged to buy their homes, and who are now struggling to pay their mortgages? How will he help those whose homes are being repossessed? What will he do to help those whom he set up and whom he has now knocked down?

Sir George Young: I am sure that all the people to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred will welcome the fall in interest rates, which will reduce the pressure on budgets. We should keep the matter in perspective—98·7 per cent. of those with mortgages are not six months or more behind with their payments.

Mr. Hawkins: How would the Government react to building societies' participating in schemes to recycle repossessed properties into the private rented sector, making them available for letting to priority groups?

Sir George Young: The Government would welcome any such initiative by building societies. I understand that one or two are considering taking such properties into their ownership and then putting them out to rent, perhaps to those in need.

Mr. Soley: I do not think that the Minister intended to mislead the House, but the drop in interest rates will make no difference to most mortgage payers, as the Halifax building society itself pointed out recently.

Mortgage repossession is the fastest-growing cause of homelessness in families. Will the Minister join me in pursuing an option advanced by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, together with certain housing associations and local authorities—the development of a mortgage rescue package designed to stop the dream of home ownership from turning into the nightmare of bed-and-breakfast accommodation paid for by the poll tax payer?

Sir George Young: I think that most mortgage payers would take a slightly different view of the fall in interest rates from that advocated by the hon. Gentleman. His point about homelessness should also be seen in perspective: repossessions account for about 10 per cent. of homelessness—they are not a significant factor.

As I have said, I will be meeting the Council of Mortgage Lenders tomorrow, and talking through with it some of its proposals to help families to avoid going into bed-and-breakfast accommodation after their homes have been repossessed.

Mr. Latham: I have been a vice-president of the Building Societies Association for 10 years. When my hon. Friend meets the societies tomorrow, will he point out that some of them have been rather slow in bringing down their interest rates following the fall in wider interest rates? Is it not time that some of them responded rather more quickly to the needs of their mortgage payers?

Sir George Young: I shall take a copy of today's *Hansard* to the meeting and show the societies my hon. Friend's question.

BISF Houses

8. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any new proposals to assist BISF home owners.

Mr. Yeo: No.

Mr. Murphy: I thank the Minister for that useful reply.

Does the Minister agree that there is widespread concern on both sides of the House about BISF and other defective housing, and the problems that it causes both for home owners and for those who rent? Does he agree that local authorities' maintenance budgets cannot cope with those problems, and will he assure the House that he will undertake a fresh examination of the designation of special defective houses?

Mr. Yeo: I am afraid that I shall not do that. It is clear to us from the information now available that no case exists for designating BISF houses under the housing defects legislation. Any owner of a BISF house—or, indeed, any other house that is in poor condition—can apply for a mandatory renovation grant to bring his property up to standard, which may cover 100 per cent. of the cost. I do not think that any further reaction from the Government is called for.

Local Government Finance

9. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the Government's position on the poll tax.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget a new grant to reduce community charges by £140 in 1991-92. I announced on 21 March that the community charge would be replaced at the earliest opportunity by a new local tax.

Mr. Winnick: Leaving aside last night's debate, is the Secretary of State not all disappointed that surveys and polls have shown that the public—including members of the Conservative party—are no more enthusiastic about his proposed two-tax scheme, incorporating "son of poll tax", than they are about the existing poll tax scheme? As there seem to be as many proposals from the Conservative Benches for replacing the poll tax as there are Tory Members, why does the Secretary of State not admit frankly that the Tory party is hopelessly split on the issue and does not have a clue how to proceed?

Mr. Heseltine: The one very clear message in the opinion polls is that the party to which I belong is eight points up on where it was three months ago. No wonder the Labour party is so worried.

Mr. Fry: When my right hon. Friend introduces the new tax, will he abandon the very expensive register that has been such a heavy cost on local authorities, ignore the protests of the Labour party and have the courage to use the electoral register, setting it against the number of adults in a house?

Mr. Heseltine: I must ask my hon. Friend to allow the consultation paper, which will cover these matters, to be published in the early part of April. Then we shall be able to examine both this and a number of other matters.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If and when the Secretary of State abolishes the poll tax and replaces it with his twin tax, what assurances will he be able to give to some of my constituents who live in a high-rated and high-value property in central London? The several adults who live in that property are either not earning or have minimal incomes. Will the new system be securely based on that household's ability to pay, not on other artificial criteria relating to property and the number of people, irrespective of income?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is wrong not to remember that we have announced clearly that the community charge will end by 1993 and that we shall replace it not with two taxes but with one. On his specific question, he can be very sure that we shall have those matters in mind.

Humberside

10. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the final report from the Local Government Boundary Commission regarding the future of the county of Humberside.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I hope to receive the final report later this summer.

Mr. Brown: If, when my hon. Friend receives that report, it should confirm the draft proposals that were announced last November to abolish the county of Humberside and at least transfer my constituency into the county of Lincolnshire, what will he do? If it says that Humberside county council should be kept, what will he do about that recommendation? Can he assure my constituents that, whatever happens, as a result of the statement made last Thursday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, the sentence of death has been pronounced on the county of Humberside?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend tempts me to say things that would be very premature. Moreover, he has asked a series of leading hypothetical questions. I should like the Local Government Boundary Commission to publish its final report as soon as possible so that I can consider it as soon as possible.

Mr. Morley: Does the Minister accept that what counts with many people in Humberside is the very high quality of the services provided by Humberside county council? Does he further accept that the original decision to review Humberside was political, since it was announced just before the Conservative local government conference? However, it gave them no political advantage, cost a great deal of money and caused much uncertainty. As there is now to be a national review, should not the local review be stopped so that an overall approach can be adopted? Surely that would be better than picking on one local authority.

Mr. Portillo: Of course, I reject the idea that the origins of the inquiry were in any way political. It is perfectly clear to anyone who knows the area that the issue needs to be considered and that there have been strong expressions of public opinion on the matter. After all the work that has been done, it is important that the final report should be published so that my right hon. Friend and I can consider it.

Mr. Batiste: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Humberside report of the Local Government Boundary Commission is just one of several reports that are outstanding covering the Yorkshire area and other parts of the country? Given the announcement a few weeks ago that the Parliamentary Boundary Commission is about to start its next project, will my hon. Friend ensure that these local government reports are brought to a conclusion as quickly as possible?

Mr. Portillo: That is desirable as a general principle. I do not believe that anything that my right hon. Friend has announced should inhibit the Local Government Boundary Commission in proceeding with its work speedily.

Natural Environment (Eastern Europe)

11. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department is giving to east European nations' efforts to improve their natural environment.

Mr. Trippier: My Department has provided advice and assistance to the Polish and Czech Environment Ministers and to officials from these and other east European countries during recent visits to the United Kingdom; we

have set up a new division with specific responsibility for environmental protection issues in Europe and have just completed a fact-finding mission to Poland; we are also working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on a number of projects for Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, funded by the know-how fund; and we are contributing to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's east European programme.

Sir David Steel: What has happened to the register of pollution which the previous Secretary of State promised to the House last May? What steps have the Minister and the Department of Trade and Industry taken to ensure that, in the natural desire for industrial investment, we are not exporting environmentally substandard technology to eastern Europe?

Mr. Trippier: We could not do that and I certainly give the assurance that the right hon. Gentleman seeks on that point. I said in my substantive answer that we had had a number of official visits from some east European countries. I find it interesting and impressive that they choose to come to the United Kingdom to find out how we bring about environmental enhancement, principally through the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, I hope that the register, which will be very elaborate in terms of the European Environmental Agency, will stretch far wider than the European Community and will incorporate central and eastern European countries, which will enable us all to do what we can to help with their problems.

Sir John Stokes: In view of the forthcoming budget deficit, should not the Government consider carefully all overseas aid, however desirable?

Mr. Trippier: What we are talking about on the substantive question is not necessarily supplying overseas aid to help with many projects, but ensuring that countries that need to enhance their environment are aware of the expertise that exists in western Europe. We have considerable expertise and we are happy to make it available to those countries when and if they need it.

Waste (Landfill Sites)

12. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on his policies to encourage local government to reduce the volume of waste deposited in landfill sites.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): Our policies for encouraging waste minimalisation and recycling will help to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. In particular, the introduction of recycling credits under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will provide a market-based financial incentive to recycle domestic waste rather than send it for landfill.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he aware that if "This Common Inheritance", the huge tome published by a supposedly green Government, is to be little more than a waste of trees, he should be doing more to encourage capital expenditure on incineration and recycling plants which would materially reduce the amount of waste? If all waste were recycled, only 20 per cent. would go into landfill. If that were to happen, it would help the residents of areas like Johnstown in my constituency, who are threatened with a huge site next to their homes. It would also affect the Pen-y-Bont works proposal which threatens the Dee, a water course serving the Wirral and the rest of Clwyd. Residents would be far better off and would be better served by recycling plants than by the threat of dumping.

Mr. Baldry: We are making available £40 million of supplementary credits over the next three years for exactly the sort of projects that the hon. Gentleman wants.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that the number of potential landfill sites has been increased by quarries identified as a result of interim development orders designated between 1943 and 1948, even before sites of special scientific interest and other environmental designations existed? Will my hon. Friend bring forward the consultation paper on IDOs and ensure, as a result of the consultation, that environmental impact assessments are carried out on every IDO before development?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will have heard my hon. Friend's comments. I am sure that he will want to guarantee that the consultation process takes place efficiently and effectively and that the views of my hon. Friend are considered.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: When does the Secretary of State intend to publish a full timetable for the implementation of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990? Does he agree that, although many local authorities and voluntary bodies are co-operating and tackling problems extremely well, we need a national strategy for waste and that the Government are not providing that leadership?

Mr. Baldry: We do have a national strategy for waste. It is set out in the Environmental Protection Act. But of course the final decision on the most appropriate facility for any area must lie with the waste disposal authority. I am sure that the hon. Lady would be the first to carp if we in Whitehall sought to take decisions that she thought would be far more appropriately taken by local authorities.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that it is absolute nonsense for waste, including industrial waste, to be transported 200 or 300 miles to be dumped in old quarries, as is proposed in north Wales? It is unacceptable to local communities to have other people's waste dumped on them. It is also unacceptable environmentally and because of the transport costs of carrying waste enormous distances. Surely a better answer can be found.

Mr. Baldry: The higher standards and the higher costs that landfill sites will be required to meet under the Environmental Protection Act will also increase the competitiveness of other methods of waste disposal such as recycling. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that and I commend to him the paper on recycling credits published yesterday which makes that clear.

Community Charge

13. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to abolish the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Yesterday we debated legislation to reduce by £140 the community charge in 1991-92.

We shall introduce at the earliest opportunity legislation to replace the community charge by a new local tax with two essential elements: the number of adults in a household and the value of the property.

Mr. McKelvey: If the basis of the poll tax element of the head-home hybrid is to be a three-person family, how will a two-person family claim a rebate and how will the additional money be collected from a four, five or six-person family?

Mr. Portillo: I do not know from where the hon. Gentleman got the assumption with which he started his question.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that one aspect of the community charge that all sensible people like is the fact that it promotes accountability and comparability between authorities? Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that any replacement for the community charge will have a wide base of people paying it so that we continue to have sensible accountability and central comparability and so that we can show the inefficient Labour councils for what they are—disasters compared with the efficient Conservative councils?

Mr. Portillo: It is certainly true that the present system has shown that to be the case. My hon. Friend knows perfectly well that the local tax that we are proposing contains two elements: the number of adults and the value of the property.

Mr. Clelland: Does the Minister agree that one good reason for abolishing the poll tax is the answer that the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) yesterday when he said that the way in which other local electors could achieve the zero rate of poll tax now achieved in Wandsworth would be to vote Conservative? Is not that, by implication, saying to the voters of Wandsworth that the only way to retain a zero rate of poll tax or a 100 per cent. Government grant is by continuing to vote Tory? Is not that a warning to the electors of Wandsworth that they must continue to vote Tory or be bribed to vote otherwise? Is not that a most vile and corrupt expression from a Government Minister and should not he resign, along with his partners in crime?

Mr. Portillo: As was explained to the House yesterday, Wandsworth gets less grant than do a number of Labour authorities. Unfortunately, several of those Labour authorities set very high community charges. Wandsworth manages with its grant alone under the new reduction and therefore does not need to set a community charge.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend ensure that under the new tax, which I welcome warmly, people will not be penalised for making internal improvements to their properties?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend will have to wait for the publication of the consultation document. He will have seen that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already said that he is concerned to ensure that people are not penalised because of the area in which they live, which might disproportionately affect the value of their property.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister consider a bargain? Since Scotland went first in the experiment last time, can England go first next time? Scotland will experiment with a local income tax, which would be much more administratively feasible.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Wales and for Scotland intend that the legislation should have effect in all three places at the same time.

15. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what latest representations he has received about his review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Many people have welcomed our decision to reduce headline community charges by £140 in 1991-92 and to introduce a new local tax.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Minister aware of representations made yesterday by a group of parents from Warwickshire —a Tory shire for almost an entire century—against the capping and underfunding of that Tory authority by a Tory Government? In the words of the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens), the authority risks serious reductions in education provision for under-fives, the closing of homes for the elderly and the closing of facilities for people with learning difficulties. How are the people in that Tory shire to deal with the Government's financial strictures? Who is to blame for this crisis and how will it be put right?

Mr. Portillo: The criteria for capping will be applied equally to authorities of whatever colour. One thing that will affect the level of services in any place is the number of people who have been willing to pay the community charge, and the hon. Gentleman is on weak ground on that point.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend accept that true economy and proper accountability in local government will be achieved only where local authorities are made responsible for raising £1 locally for every 100p that they spend? If that means transferring major functions away from local authorities, so be it.

Mr. Portillo: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is a powerful one. However, it is difficult to imagine that we could ever get away from a system that took account of the different needs of different areas as we make our grants to those areas. It is difficult to escape from a grant mechanism that takes account of needs.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Minister intend to apologise to the House for bothching the figures that he gave during the debate on the poll tax the other day? Before the Budget statement last week, when the £4¼ billion was announced, were there discussions within his Department on the position of local authorities sending out bills that were subsequently to become invalid? Were there discussions and was the Department aware of what was happening?

Mr. Portillo: Of course, and if the hon. Gentleman had read my speech, he would have seen that I explained why those decisions had to be announced in the Budget. When I gave the figure I said that if it was wrong, I would come to the House the next day with the right figure, and that I did.

16. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the number of people who will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme compared to those who benefited from transitional relief.

Mr. Key: The effect of our recent announcement is that all charge payers will benefit from a general reduction in their bills of £140. In addition, about 16 million charge payers in England will also benefit from further help from the community charge reduction scheme. This is about 9 million more than under transitional relief.

Mrs. Hicks: Is my hon. Friend aware that as a result of the generous announcement made last week, not one of my constituents will have to pay a penny over £275? In addition, several thousand already stand to benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. Is not it important, so that people can budget, that they should know as soon as possible how much they will pay? Can my hon. Friend give me a general idea of when they can expect to receive their bills?

Mr. Key: We have decided that the balance of funding of local authority services between central Government and local government should be changed. That must be welcome. The exact figures for any individual authority cannot be announced until we know what claims the authorities put into the Department of the Environment for the scheme.

Mr. Tony Banks: For the record, will the Minister make it absolutely clear that the reduction will not be £140 for all poll tax payers? Those people on income support, who pay 20 per cent., will receive only £28 and after they have spent £1,100 on VAT-charged goods and services, they will be paying for that £28. For the record, too, will the Minister tell us when the poll tax flagship turned into a Tory millstone?

Mr. Key: It must be remembered that the people saving £28 are asked to pay only 20 per cent. in the first place. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced, our intention is that people should not find this tax too heavy a burden.

Dr. Hampson: Does my hon. Friend agree that most people want a certain degree of stability and security for the future? The old rating system took no account of the anomaly of the single-person household, as distinct from a household accommodating several wage earners. Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to make it absolutely clear that, with the further change, we shall not need to retain anything like a poll tax register?

Mr. Key: The first point that must be made absolutely clear is that we are going into consultation. My hon. Friend will have to wait a couple of weeks to discover exactly what is in our mind.

Mr. Blunkett: May we explore a little further the statement made on Monday by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities in the debate on the money resolution relating to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill? On that occasion, the Minister announced that 8 million people would benefit from the community charge reduction scheme. Less than 24 hours later, he was contradicted by the Secretary of State, who said that he was pleased to take the House a stage further by telling us that, as a result of the arrangements that the Government were making, 16 million, rather than 8 million, people would benefit. Was not he aware that, in January, it had been announced that 18 million people would benefit? Did not he know that the scheme that was approved overnight actually reduces the benefit that is available through the community charge reduction scheme, reduces the benefit that is available through the rebate scheme and transfers money from the poor to the rich through the VAT increase? People with second homes will receive £428, whereas those on supplementary benefit will get only £28. It is a disgrace that the rich get more and the poor get less.

Mr. Key: The only disgrace is that the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand the arithmetic. The important point is that, whereas under the old scheme 8 million people were helped, the outturn figure is now 16 million. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be delighted with that. The net extra grant to local authorities will amount to about £4·3 billion and we plan to make savings of £1·3 billion on community charge benefit and other reliefs. That has allowed us to make a number of improvements. It is increasingly strange that, in recent days, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has been more interested in preserving the status quo and protecting the vested interest lobbies of local government than in helping the people of this country.

Mr. Sayeed: Now that the abolitionists are clearly in the ascendant, will the Government turn their attention to abolition of the county council in Avon, which is the most unnatural and unloved of counties? Is my hon. Friend aware that Avon county council, on which the socialists are the largest party, has consistently increased its community charge at a rate much higher than the rate of inflation?

Mr. Key: I was in Bristol quite recently and I sympathise with my hon. Friend. This will be a matter for the local government commission that my right hon. Friend hopes to set up.

Housing Action Trusts

17. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to allow local authorities or housing associations to make use of underspending arising out of the failure to set up any of the planned housing action trusts.

Mr. Heseltine: No, Sir. Tenants are currently voting in Hull—on a proposal supported by the city council—and a ballot is due in a few months in Waltham Forest.

Mr. Dunnachie: I am disappointed in that reply in view of the current deplorable position of no housing action trusts having yet been formed. Money has been put aside, but has not been used. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider his decision and use that money to allow local authorities to build or renovate houses for the people of their areas?

Mr. Heseltine: The moral of the story is that a housing action trust should come into existence and take advantage of the money that is available as quickly as possible.

Community Charge

21. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about the conclusions of his review of the poll tax.

Mr. Heseltine: I have nothing to add at this stage to my statement to the House on 21 March.

Mr. Beith: Would the Secretary of State like to have a shot at making another statement about the replacement of the poll tax? He did not make everybody happy with the first one and his hon. Friends might have a happier Easter if they were given a clearer picture of what his new tax will involve and whether it will be strictly related to the ability to pay, as would be the case with a local income tax. Or will it remain an arbitrary tax?

Mr. Heseltine: The people who are unhappy about my statement are sitting on the Opposition Benches. They now realise that we have clear answers to our proposals while they have none.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who made representations to him about the review are delighted with his proposals and that the people who are unhappy are those who have been encouraging individuals not to pay? They now realise that we have proposed a scheme that will make it impossible for them to carry on with their campaign.

Mr. Heseltine: I much appreciate my hon. Friend's observation. Our new local tax will be consistent with one bill for each household. Collection will therefore be easier and more certain.

Council Homes, Bradford

22. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes have been built by Bradford metropolitan district council in each of the last three years.

Mr. Yeo: Completions of new council dwellings reported by Bradford metropolitan district council were 42, 47 and nil in 1987, 1988 and 1989 respectively. Returns received for 1990 cover only the months up to August and these show no further completions of council housing.

Mr. Madden: Do not those miserable figures represent a massive indictment of the Government's failure to respond to the housing crisis that has gripped Bradford for the past 12 years? Does the Minister recognise that that crisis is now so acute that the council is considering formally closing its housing waiting list on which there are 9,000 applicants? When will the Government pump into Bradford the necessary funds to enable the council to build homes for the thousands of families who urgently and desperately need them?

Mr. Yeo: In addition to the local authority council housing completions to which I referred, almost 400 housing association dwellings have been completed in the same period. Substantial estate action support totalling almost £10 million over the past three years has also been pumped into Bradford. The question that the hon. Gentleman should really be addressing is why Bradford council has kept empty 700 houses that could be used for housing the homeless, about whom the hon. Gentleman purports to be so concerned.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the people who want low-cost houses to rent in Bradford would do better if their local authority were to copy Ryedale district council in transferring its housing stock to a housing association? My hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Madden) shows that housing associations are now the proper route for the provision of homes to rent. As the people of Bradford once had the good sense to vote in a Conservative council, does my hon. Friend agree that if the council in Bradford were to consult the people of Bradford, as Ryedale district council consulted in Ryedale, it would receive a strong and positive answer to any request to do that?

Mr. Yeo: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend and take this opportunity of saying how much we welcome the transfer of Ryedale's council housing stock in its entirety to a housing association, which was approved only a week of two ago. The effect of that transfer is to bring in substantial funds from the private sector, some of which are available to Ryedale council for any other housing needs in its area. I commend the same process not only to Bradford, but to a great many other Labour-controlled authorities, because I have no doubt that the tenants in all those areas would benefit enormously if their councils were willing to follow the example that has been set by Ryedale.

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

23. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he had any plans to relax the controls imposed on local authorities making use of capital receipts for housing purposes.

Mr. Key: No, Sir.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that more than 800 families on the urgent waiting lists in my constituency desperately need new housing? If the hon. Gentleman were genuinely concerned about those social problems, would not he allow local authorities to use money which is being legitimately raised, under his instruction, to build new houses for those desperately in need?

Mr. Key: I understand the hon. Lady's concern. Every hon. Member has housing problems in his constituency, but relaxing the debt redemption rules would not mean that more resources were available for housing. It would mean that resources were available in the wrong places —where receipts arise rather than where new investment is needed.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 22 APRIL

Members successful in the ballot were:
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe
Dr. Keith Hampson
Mrs. Alice Mahon.

BILLS PRESENTED

Established Church

Mr. Michael Latham presented a Bill to abolish the General Synod of the Church of England, on a date to be appointed; to provide for the creation of a Church of England Assembly, consisting of a house of all diocesan, suffragan and assistant bishops, and a joint house of clergy

and laity, to be directly elected by all Anglican clergy and lay persons on parochial electoral rolls; to empower the Assembly to decide on all appropriate matters, except those within the legal responsibilities of the Church Commissioners, without further reference to Parliament; to provide for the election of new bishops by members of the house of bishops, saving the right of final approval of the chosen candidate by the Crown; to abolish the Ecclesiastical Committee; to abolish the automatic places of bishops in the House of Lords; to permit ordained clergy of the Church of England, with the consent of a diocesan bishop, to seek election to the House of Commons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 April and to be printed. [Bill 126.]

Leasehold Reform

Mr. Terry Lewis, supported by Mr. Tony Lloyd, Mr. Keith Bradley, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Mr. Ian McCartney, Ms. Dawn Primarolo and Mr. George Howarth, presented a Bill to amend the Leasehold Reform Acts 1967 and 1979; to prevent the establishment of further 999 year leasehold agreements; to establish new formulae for calculating the sale value of an existing lease to an occupier of long lease residential property; to remove from existing leaseholders the obligations to seek permission of the ground landlord when carrying out improvements to the property; to establish the right of long leaseholders to manage their property in a manner of their own choice; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 April and ordered to be printed. [Bill 127.]

Empty Homes

3.31 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable residential property, unoccupied for a specified period and not offered for sale or let, to be transferred from the ownership of public landlords to the ownership of housing associations; to amend the law to provide incentives to private landlords to let empty residential property; and for connected purposes.

There can be few hon. Members whose constituency work is untouched by the rising tide of homelessness. In my constituency experience, the number of people looking for accommodation from the local authority and from other public authorities has increased markedly in recent years.

It is easy to be judgmental and to seek to fix blame, but the honest answer is that the causes of the rise in the number of homeless families are many and it is not always easy to attach blame. Experience seems to confirm that marital breakdown and family break-up are the largest factors behind the increase in homeless applications to public sector housing bodies. It is easy to understand why. A married couple with two young children drift apart; automatically, one housing unit becomes two. The party with the children, usually the mother—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that hon. Members are waiting for the next debate, but they should listen to the submissions of the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt).

Mr. Burt: The party with the children, usually the mother, either remarries or finds another partner. All too often, sadly, there are problems between step-parents and children, and the children seek to leave as soon as they become old enough. The number of housing units represented by that one family becomes two, three, four or even more. Children—sometime barely 16 or 17—drift to larger cities, and the damage is done.

Whatever the causes of the breakdown and the pressure on those who seek to house the homeless, it is not merely enough to analyse or to lay blame—all that can be done must be done—and my Bill points a finger at something that may be responsible, empty properties.

The figures for the number of empty properties throughout this country are simply staggering. On the latest figures, this year 145,000 households were accepted as homeless. On 1 April 1990, there were 99,352 empty council properties, of which almost a quarter—23,000—had been empty for more than a year. Similar figures for housing associations suggest that more than 21,000 of their properties are vacant. Central Government have some 31,000 vacant properties that belong to the Department of Health, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office. But the private sector has more than 500,000 properties vacant. In my area of the north-west, 83,245 properties of all types are vacant.

I do not doubt for a moment that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, whose personal commitment to housing the homeless cannot be questioned by anyone in the House, is making strenuous efforts to tackle the problem.

Recently a number of measures have been introduced by the Government that are likely to assist. Changes to the Rent Acts are designed to provide incentives for landlords in the private sector to rent more property. Those changes have ended the fears that have been associated with private renting for too long. Specific grants have recently been made to local authorities and housing associations, particularly in London and the south-east. The Government also believe that the ending of ring fencing in housing revenue accounts and the introduction of performance indicators will improve the accountability of managements. However, I do not believe that those measures, good though they are, are good enough. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear hear."] I knew that that point was significant, but perhaps not that significant.

I believe that the measures that the Government have introduced, good though they are, could be further improved. The Bill seeks to introduce a number of other measures. First, on the public sector, the Bill proposes that housing associations should be empowered to take over empty properties from the public sector, either from local councils or the Government. Secondly, the Bill would require the compiling of a register of empty property in all areas, which is necessary to identify what is empty and why. Thirdly, the Bill proposes a mixture of penalties and incentives in relation to private property. On incentives, it is possible that some further changes in the tax regime would make private renting more attractive. I believe that it is possible for housing associations to do more on management to deal with some of the difficulties and hassles. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a submission to the House, but it is difficult even for me to hear what it is.

Mr. Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that it is also possible for housing associations to work more closely with private landlords to relieve them of some of the difficulties of management. There is also a large unexplored sector comprising of flats above shops that could be put to more use.

If those measures and the steps already taken by the Government were not enough, the Bill would also seek to give housing associations and possibly, in limited circumstances, local authorities a similar power to that in the public sector to take over empty private property for a time for use for housing. That step would be drastic and would have to be subject to extremely strict controls. The property would need to have been empty for some time and it would need to be proved before a court that the landlord had no further intention of bringing the property into use within a reasonable time. That provision might encourage a great deal more private property back into use without its powers being used.

Homelessness is not an easy problem to cure. The vast majority of people who work with the homeless—I am indebted to the empty property unit at Shelter for helping me to prepare the Bill—are stretched to the limit by circumstances beyond their control. All available means must be used to ensure that families, especially those including children, get the best possible chance of accommodation and move away from the hostels and bed-and-breakfast accommodation that absorb far too many financial resources and provide no living beyond existence for those forced to make use of them.

If we bring empty properties back into use, that will provide an excellent opportunity for the future. I wish the Government proposals that deal with the problem well,

[Mr. Burt]

but I urge the Government to consider some of the proposals advanced in the Bill, which I have pleasure to put before the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Ken Hargreaves, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Simon Hughes and Mr. David Sumberg.

Written Question 124

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any request from the Prime Minister to answer written question 124 orally? It asks the Prime Minister

"whether he has any plans to assist former Prime Ministers with their office and secretarial expenses."

I feel that the House should be notified about the matter before the debate today begins. It might have been appropriate to question the Prime Minister on whether he has any such plans.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the whole House will read the answer when it is available.

Confidence in Her Majesty's Government

Mr. Speaker: Before we start the debate on the motion, I invite the House to look at the motion on the Order Paper today. As hon. Members will see, it is not a general no confidence motion. It relates specifically to the poll tax. The debate should go no wider than that.

I have not selected either of the amendments on the Order Paper.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for delaying the House, but for weeks past—or days past—we have had promises from Opposition spokesmen that this no confidence debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must hear what the point of order is.

Sir Norman Fowler *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the right hon. Gentleman sit down, please? I must hear what the point of order is.

Sir Norman Fowler: Opposition spokesmen promised that they intended to give the House an opportunity to debate a range of issues. With respect, may I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to review the decision that you have just announced and allow issues other than the single one you mentioned to be debated?

Mr. Speaker: That is not within my discretion. We must debate the motion on the Order Paper.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you for some clarification? It has certainly been clear from all that we have heard from the Labour party recently and, indeed, in a radio discussion in which I participated with the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) this morning *—[Interruption.]* I am coming to the point of order. The hon. Member for Copeland made it clear that the purpose of the debate this afternoon was to discuss a range of policies*—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. How can I possibly hear what is being said if hon. Members bray in this manner?

Mr. MacGregor: From what the hon. Gentleman said this morning, it was clearly the Opposition's intention to range widely in the debate. Would it be in order to debate not only the community charge on its own but the issues of local government finance which are clearly relevant to the community charge and local government in general? That is important. As the Opposition have failed to frame the no confidence motion which they intended, is it not clear that they are unable not only to develop coherent and clear policies but to frame a motion of the sort that they wanted?

Mr. Speaker: The whole House knows that under Standing Orders we have to debate the motions on the Order Paper. It will, of course, be in order to draw attention to the finances of local government within the context of the poll tax.

3.44 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I beg to move,

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government in the light of its inability to rectify the damage done to the British people by the poll tax.

You may be absolutely certain, Mr. Speaker, that I shall stick to the subject about which the Government wish to hear least—the poll tax. On future occasions, before the general election, doubtlessly due to the incompetence of the Government, there will be other reasons for tabling other motions of no confidence in the Government.

We have tabled the motion, first, because it is the Government who have got Britain into the poll tax mess, and, secondly, because it is now certain that the Government will never get Britain out of it. In his statement last Thursday, the Secretary of State for the Environment said that the Government proposed a tax with

"a single bill for each household comprising two essential elements, the number of adults living there and the value of the property . . . assessing values, on a capital or a rental basis".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 404.]

As soon as he said that, it was clear that the poll tax was still alive—alive and kicking the British people.

From the Government who brought us the poll tax to replace the rates we have a new epic—the poll tax and the rates. The best that they have been able to suggest is a head tax combined in some way with a roof tax, topped up by 17·5 per cent. VAT and wrapped in the cotton wool of consultation. The reason for the device of consultation is the same reason as for putting forward the mixed poll tax and property tax. It is not to do with the defence or advance of the national interest; it is to try to keep the conflicting factions in the Conservative party and the Cabinet together with some appeasement for each of them.

In the Conservative party now, some want wholesale property tax, some want to keep the poll tax and some want to increase VAT to 20 per cent. or more and finance all of local government services from that. What they would do about accountability, God only knows. Therefore, the Government, faced with those factions, have tried to come up with something that will meet the needs and desires of every Tory fragment.

Apart from right hon. and hon. Members who applaud the Prime Minister now just as they applauded the introduction of the poll tax, who can be reassured when the final shape of the new tax mixture is so deliberately vague? In the Tory party and the country, who can be content that Conservative candidates will have to go into the local elections on 2 May with no knowledge of whether they are supporting a poll tax, a property tax or a mixed tax? It appears that they will have to fight those local elections on a manifesto entitled, "Wait and See" and under the slogan, "Don't ask us, we're only the Government".

In this whole tangle, there are assiduous attempts to blame the entire poll tax mess solely on the previous Prime Minister. Had the poll tax been introduced by a singular dictatorial flourish, it would be possible to give some credence to the idea that only the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was guilty, but it was not quite like that, was it? Everyone will have some understanding and sympathy with the irritation and resentment that the former Prime Minister must rightly feel when she hears colleagues who sat with her around the Cabinet table or on Cabinet committees now trying to give the impression that they were against the poll tax all the time, really.

The present Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He says that he was "bounced" into the poll tax. Frankly, that says rather more about the right hon. Gentleman's character than about the right hon. Lady. Others—the present Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Health and for Employment—were all local government Ministers serving their time introducing the poll tax.

The Secretary of State for Transport was the Scottish Secretary, the Home Secretary was the Environment Secretary, and the present chairman of the Conservative party was the Secretary of State for the Environment when the poll tax was inflicted on England and Wales.

We are at the first anniversary of the time when the right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Community Charge is here to stay . . . Maybe one day we'll have people breaking the law and painting on the sides of buildings 'Up with the Community Charge! Down with the rates'".

Does that sound like a man being bounced?

In April last year—we are just a week away from the first anniversary of this—the Prime Minister said that the poll tax would be "a very much fairer and more acceptable system"

I do not think that that sounds like someone in the Cabinet being dragged unwillingly and unwittingly into supporting the poll tax.

Some 12 months later, the British people can draw their own conclusions about those and other members of Her Majesty's Government. Either those Ministers were all innocent but gullible and did not know the truth about the poll tax, or the more ugly conclusion can be drawn: they did know the truth but a mixture of deference and ambition made dishonest men of them. Either way—gullible or guilty—they should not be sitting here now.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Totteridge and Devon, West): Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that his proposal for the replacement of the community charge which involves the centralisation of computer records to allow the information on every citizen of the United Kingdom to be available is real dictatorship?

Mr. Kinnock: I shall send a copy of our proposals to the hon. Lady, who will see that they contain no proposition more centralising than that of the rates system that we intend to reintroduce.

The Government ploughed on with the poll tax despite the advice coming from hundreds of Tory councillors, ssmall businesses, a variety of independent sources and those supporting them that the poll tax was wrong and could never work. They got rid of the right hon. Member for Finchley. They had a review, and then a review of the review. They introduced the poll tax capping criteria that caught some Tory councils. The whole squandering sequence cost £400 million to set up, £300 million a year to maintain, £6 billion to try to mitigate and £1·5 billion a year because of revenue lost from the 7·5 million people who could not pay their poll tax. Now, on top of that, they are to spend £4·25 billion in VAT—and still the turmoil goes on.

Until Monday of this week, we were being told that 18 million people would benefit from the Government's

[Mr. Kinnock]

community charge reduction scheme, then the figure became 8 million—although it came from the Minister of State, who usually gets things wrong—and then it became 16 million. When there are such variations, it is obviously necessary for everyone to have a clear description of how their reductions are being worked out. Therefore, I was glad that this morning the Department of the Environment provided the public with an explanation, reported by Mr. Timmins of *The Independent*. According to the Department of the Environment, the calculation will be as follows:

"You take two times the reduced community charge, minus, in brackets, the old rateable value plus one £52 threshold for a couple, two for three people and so on. The result is divided by two, three or four, depending on the number of adults in the household. That gives you the amount of reduction each. That is taken away from the reduced community charge to work out what people actually pay."

The Independent also states:

"Those who have moved this financial year will now qualify—although not if they move again next year."

Nothing could be clearer than that! I am sure that, if the Department of the Environment has got anything wrong, the Prime Minister will rectify any errors when he speaks later.

Meanwhile, the costs of the poll tax system go on piling up—£18 million a day. We have a panic decision to scrap existing poll tax bills and issue revised ones. That of itself will cost the taxpayers of Britain another £200 million. After all that, what we have not got from all the cost and chaos of the poll tax system is a single additional home help. We have not got a single extra police officer, not an extra teacher, not an extra road repair—and that is not even taking into account the fact that the Government inflicted the community charge but they stopped community care. There is nothing better in any of the vital services as a consequence of having this preposterously expensive and unjust system.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Do I understand the right hon. Gentleman to say that during the period of the community charge in Scotland, there has been no increase in the number of local government employees? If so, it is not true.

Mr. Kinnock: Of course there has been a huge increase in local government employees—to run the poll tax.

Tragically, it is not just that the people have not got more as a consequence of paying the extra costs of the poll tax and the poll tax system: it is the fact that they have actually got less. Tory authorities all over the country are cutting education, social services and highways maintenance in an effort to avoid capping. Every other kind of local authority is having to do the same.

As today's figures show, crime is at the highest level in our history. But Mr. David Owen, the chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers, has to report that six major urban areas in Britain face the loss of 1,700 police officers—a result of the poll tax capping system. None of that will change with the £140 poll tax cut that some will get. In Tory authorities, Labour authorities and authorities with no overall control all across Britain, spending levels are still set at the same figures. The supply of essential services about which the Prime Minister professes to care so much recently will continue to shrink.

Even in the midst of their relief at the reduction of £140 that some will get in their poll tax bills, the British people know where the money is coming from. They know that it is coming from themselves. They know that they are being made to pay for the Government's errors and hypocrisies in the poll tax system. In their claim, as we have heard it over the last week since the Budget, to be using something called Government funds to mitigate the poll tax, the Government are acting like the bank robbers who return part of their loot to try to reduce their overdrafts.

But I suppose that, in imposing higher VAT, the Government are at least honouring one principle of the poll tax, the cardinal orthodoxy, the centrepiece of the whole edifice—the principle that everyone should pay something. Everyone certainly will. Every pensioner will pay over the counter for the Government's poll tax fiasco. Every family buying a pair of trainers for their teenage children will pay. Every washing machine repair, every car repair, every home improvement will carry the extra charge—the poll tax VAT surcharge.

Everyone must pay something, the Government say. We heard the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying it again to Mr. Walden on Sunday. He said:

"What we have maintained is the principle that everybody ought to contribute towards the cost of local government, the so-called principle of universality."

The Chancellor cannot have known that at the very time, Sunday lunchtime, that he was reasserting that fundamental immutable principle to Mr. Walden on television the Secretary of State for the Environment was telling Mr. Dimbleby on television, not that "everybody" should pay, but that "most" should pay. As *The Times* newspaper judged on Monday,

"The glaring contrast
between them
"shows the extent of the fudge which lay behind Mr. Heseltine's statement."

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The implication of what the right hon. Gentleman is saying is that, under his party's proposals, there would be a great improvement, and an increase in the services which, by implication, would be through an increase in the revenue support grant from his party. If so, will he tell us—I think that it would be reasonable for him to do so and I am sure that he has worked it out—what tax increases would achieve that?

Mr. Kinnock: For 12 years we have been telling, together with many others—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: For 12 years, together with many others, we have been telling the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] It was a very good question and I shall give a very good answer in my own way. We have been telling the Conservative party that it should not have been making the cuts that it has made in central Government funding for essential services. Conservative councillors have been telling them the same.

Last Tuesday, there was a deathbed repentance, and the Government reversed the policy of 12 years and started to make a provision. The answer to the question, "How much extra tax will we have to charge?" is, "Nothing at all." *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to calm down.

Mr. Kinnock: I think that Tory Members may be trying to make up for 12 years of past sin. We have no sins to make up for.

When the Secretary of State for the Environment says that most people should pay, in this subtle shift of the cardinal principle, it seems that "most" is very broad. When the Secretary of State for the Environment was asked whether nurses, students and others on low incomes will have to pay the new double tax, he said:

"the sort of coverage that we've got today will be carried into the new system. We intend the incidence of liability to remain where it is."

How will that "incidence of liability" be recorded? Perhaps the Prime Minister can tell us this afternoon. After all, he did tell us—he told me last Tuesday—that "all" questions on the poll tax would be answered

"by the end of this week."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 158.]

That was last week. He did not keep that pledge, due, I am sure, to circumstances totally beyond his control. So let him now give the answers that he promised.

First, will there be a register in his new system? The Secretary of State said on Thursday evening, "We may not need a register." A little later he said:

"we shall not need a register. I have made that clear."

On the same evening, the Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"Clearly, there will have to be some kind of register".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 422, 474.]

Will the Prime Minister, as the supreme arbiter that we are told he is, answer the register question now?

Secondly, will the Prime Minister tell us what is to be the legal liability in the two-tax, one-bill system that the Government want to foist upon every household in the country? The Secretary of State for the Environment was asked:

"Is one person in a household going to be legally liable?"

He said: "It doesn't follow." If that is the case, may I ask the Prime Minister, will everyone in the household be legally liable? Surely someone has to be legally liable: who will it be? Surely the question of legal liability does not have to await consultation. It should be a basic matter of principle, and I am sure that the Prime Minister can tell us the answer this afternoon.

Thirdly, will the 20 per cent. rule remain? Surely the Prime Minister can answer that straightforward question. Will it remain, or will he follow Labour party policy again—act the magpie again—and get rid of the 20 per cent. rule as we shall do? Fourthly, what will be the balance between the poll tax element and the property tax element in the new tax scheme? In Southport last Saturday, the Prime Minister said that "the principles" of the new tax should be based

"First, on the number of people in each household. Second, on the value of the property people live in".

Will the Prime Minister tell us precisely where he stands in the full arc from the poll tax to the rates, in the spectrum of division in his party?

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I shall give way in a moment.

A few weeks ago, the Prime Minister said:

"I think I am clear in my own mind which way we are going on the Poll Tax".

Why does he not tell us what he thinks he is clear about, or even what he thinks that he thinks he is clear about? Will he be the father of the son of poll tax, or the father of the daughter of the rates—or will he just sit there having twins?

Does the Prime Minister realise that, if he keeps a personal charge element in the two-tax system, it will be the poll tax in another form? Everyone else knows that, and the stain will never leave the Conservative party. The Secretary of State for the Environment says that these are matters of detail, and that no one should worry about the number of gainers and the number of losers. He told the Conservative Central Council in Southport last Friday:

"I think that this Party should raise its sights from the narrow focus of who gains what, when, and in what circumstances, and understand the excitement of what we are doing as a political party."

To paraphrase the Duke of Wellington, I do not know if it excites them, but it makes me ecstatic.

It may not matter to the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Prime Minister how many gainers and losers there are, but all over the country people are worried to distraction about how they will cope with their poll tax bills. To their credit, even a good many Conservative Members recognise that. The only way in which to relieve that anxiety is to do the sensible thing and scrap the poll tax now. The Secretary of State could do it by returning to a rating system made fairer by a proper system of rebates. That would save £300 million a year on operating costs alone.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the passage in "Fair Rates" which explains that, after going back to a rating system, a Labour Government would implement changes to help those hardest hit by the poll tax, but only as far as the situation that they had inherited permitted? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that only when fully implemented would such a system help seven out of 10 people?

Mr. Kinnock: That is directly explanatory. It is called being honest and prudent, not pretending to people that we can or will afford more than the country has at its disposal. The hon. Gentleman's question could only come from a party that can form an opinion but can never form a Government. I have given him an answer gratis—and have not even charged him 7p in the pound local income tax.

If the Government went back to a system of rates—as they could do straight away with the assent and co-operation of the Opposition—it would mean not only a saving of £300 million in operating costs, but a system of local taxation in which 99 per cent. of the bills were paid, because it would be an efficient system and inexpensive to operate. It would also mean that people would pay their fair share—for instance, the members of the Cabinet, all of whom gained vastly from the move from rates to poll tax. Now, scandalously, they gain again from the flat rate subsidy of £140 off the poll tax, not just on one home but on both their homes. They ought to join me in volunteering that any gains that they make out of the £140 reduction will go to charity. That would be a generous thing for them to do. It is absolutely outrageous that the Government have ensured that to them that already have well over sufficiency there shall be given even more. Come on, chip in; then we shall all give something to charity as a result of what the Government are doing.

This is the Government who gave us the poll tax, with all its vast cost and all its injustices. This is the

[Mr. Kinnock]

Government who are not killing the poll tax but keeping it. They are in a mire of their own making; they will not tell us what is to come; they will not tell the British people what to expect. Their consultation is a camouflage that does not convince most of the country, or many of their own party. Ministers are self-contradictory in what they say and, as ever, they are self-serving in what they do. Everything for them is a matter of expediency; nothing is a matter of democracy, morality or economy.

We have no confidence in the Government, because they have no competence and no conscience. They have done terrible wrongs to this country with their poll tax. By their refusal to right those wrongs, the Government have destroyed any claims that they may have had to confidence or to trust. We have no confidence in Her Majesty's Government. If they want to consult the British people, they should do it through the ballot box, straight away.

Mr. Speaker: Due to the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to place a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock.

4.12 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): It is always the right of the Opposition to test the confidence of this House in the Government. That is always their right and, in line with the conventions of the House, we shall always make time. What this debate will prove beyond all doubt is not lack of confidence in this Government but the Opposition's lack of competence—a lack of competence that even extended to putting down their motion, which they got wrong. I believe that the whole country—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There was nothing wrong with what the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier you said that the motion was entirely in order. You are the person who is responsible for that. The Prime Minister said that the motion was wrong. Will you ask the Prime Minister to withdraw what he said?

Mr. Speaker: The Prime Minister said that he did not agree with the motion on the Order Paper. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr. Bell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please sit down? The whole House heard what I said. The motion that we are debating is the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Bell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman puts severely in jeopardy his chance of being called.

Mr. Bell: The right hon. Gentleman said that the motion on the order paper was not in order. He said that it was wrong. Mr. Speaker, will you look in *Hansard* to see the words that he used, and ask him to withdraw?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has been on his feet for only about three minutes.

The Prime Minister: Millions of people this morning heard the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) say that the debate was to be about the whole range of Government policy. The motion does not permit that debate. The Opposition did not put down the motion that they wished to debate.

The whole country will also notice that, after all the Opposition said in the last day or so, last night they did not oppose our Bill to reduce the community charge. Nor, after all that the Leader of the Opposition said last week, did they vote against the increase in value added tax. When the shouting and the jeering were over, they followed where we led, because they knew that what we were doing was sensible, but they lacked the courage to admit it.

This must be the first recorded occasion on which a censure motion has been put down one week to be debated the next, and in the interim inflation has fallen, interest rates have fallen, the trade gap has narrowed and the exchange rate has risen against all the European currencies. If that is a precedent, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will put down many more such motions.

Precisely because the right hon. Gentleman got his censure motion wrong to meet what he wished to debate, we have no opportunity to debate the record of the Government as a whole. We can debate local government of course, and many aspects of the Government of course, but we cannot debate other matters that the Opposition would not wish to debate, like defence and matters of that sort on which their policies are highly inadequate. The reality is—*[Interruption.]* I wonder whether those who may be watching the debate will note how the Opposition are behaving and how little they like what they hear.

I shall come in detail to local government reform, but in the week in which the House approved the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget by 110 votes, I shall start with the appropriate aspects of the Budget. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is no good hon. Members pointing at the Chair. We have yet to hear what the Prime Minister has to say. I hope that it will be in the context of the motion.

The Prime Minister: If Opposition Members had been listening rather than shouting, they would have heard me refer to the appropriate aspects of the Budget. As its centrepiece, my right hon. Friend reduced the burden of local taxation dramatically, with £140 off the headline community charge right across the country. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I said, the headline community charge right across the country. That shift reversed the progressive rise in the local tax burden begun by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) 15 years ago. That shift is fundamental. Since the Labour party supported the Bill last night, presumably it will not reverse that shift—or will it?

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Does the Prime Minister not recall that the last three rate support grant settlements made by the Labour Government, with myself as Secretary of State, were all at 61 per cent. of local government current expenditure? Will he tell us what the percentage is now? Is it not below 40 per cent.?

The Prime Minister: I quite specifically said to the right hon. Gentleman that it has been falling consistently since 1976 when he set it. As the Opposition supported our Bill last night, presumably they are not going to reverse that

stand. Our Budget proposals reduce to just 14 per cent. the burden of local spending to be met from local tax, but yesterday the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that local taxpayers should pay not for 14 per cent. but for 20 per cent. That is a critical question for local taxpayers.

So which is it—our 14 per cent. or the hon. Gentleman's 20 per cent.? That is the first question for the Opposition. Do they accept the level of local taxation that we have set or will they raise it by more than one third from 14 to 20 per cent., as the hon. Member for Dagenham said? If they do, will they raise everyone's bills by more than one third as well? Will the hon. Gentleman or the Leader of the Opposition tell us? Do they know? Can local taxpayers look forward to local bills one third higher under a Labour Government than under us, irrespective of the levels of local spending? That is what the hon. Gentleman said. I am willing to give way to him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The hon. Member for Dagenham, the Leader of the Opposition and even the hon. Member for Copeland seem disinclined to answer.

I have a second question of equal relevance.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way when the hon. Gentleman has answered my question.

My second question is how would they raise the money. Do they want to pay for lower local taxes which they want and we want by raising central taxes other than value added tax? In his Budget response, the Leader of the Opposition was indignant that the VAT proposals applied to children's sweets. Today's third question is, which party put VAT on children's sweets in the first place? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: The silence on the Opposition Front Bench provides the answer to that—they did.

We already know that the right hon. Gentleman does not know whether he wants to increase local taxes, does not know how to fund the switch between central and local taxation and does not even know which party introduced VAT on children's sweets in the first place. In short, not only does the Leader of the Opposition not know where his policy is going,—he does not know where it has come from.

Let there be no doubt about the far-reaching nature of the Government's review of local government. We propose to simplify its structure, to assess its functions, to increase its accountability, to improve its efficiency and to reform its finance. It is the most radical review this century; the first to look at structure, functions and finance at one and the same time. We intend to give local government back to local people, so we need their help in deciding how local loyalties are best reflected in the structure of local authorities. We seek efficient delivery of local services to the local electorate, so we need to examine thoroughly how local councils can improve their management and whether some services now carried out by local authorities might be better delivered or funded directly through central Government.

The Labour party cries out for details. We could have arbitrarily decided how to proceed, but I believe that that would have been wrong. A review of this wide scope and nature demands consultation and people deserve consultation. If we had not offered consultation, we would have been rightly and bitterly criticised, not least by Opposition Members. We will listen, we will take advice and we will consider. We will do it in that order, and then decide what we are finally going to do.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I do not wish to intrude on too much private grief between two ex-Chancellors of the Exchequer. On the review, can the Prime Minister tell us what justification there is, moral or financial, for telling pensioners and those on income support this week or next week that they should pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax and that 10·8 per cent. of their disposable income should go on VAT? Will that survive the review?

The Prime Minister: Whatever any community charge payer has to pay, it would be less if the hon. Gentleman paid his community charge.

I can spell out here and now the basis of our new deal for local tax payers. There are five main principles to the review. There will be a single local tax bill for every household. That will reflect the number of adults in the household and the value of their property. The new local tax will be low. In real terms, it will be lower than the old rates bills, thanks to the fundamental shift in local taxes announced in this year's Budget. The new local tax will reflect ability to pay. There will be rebates for those on low incomes and it will not place excessive burdens on those with larger properties or on higher-priced parts of the country such as the south-east. The new local tax will keep local councils accountable to the local electorate.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me; he has been asking for much of this information for some time. He might usefully listen to me.

As I have said, the new local tax will keep local councils accountable to the local electorate. The number of adults in a household will affect the size of the local tax bill. Unlike what happened under the old rates system, a single person living alone will not pay the same as larger households. Those who use local services will be required to help pay for them. The new local tax burden will be restrained. Local government will not be allowed to impose excessive taxes through over spending. We will maintain the capping regime.

Those are the fundamental basic principles of the tax system that we will introduce.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me?

There is more than one way of meeting those objectives and it is for that reason that we propose to set out the options in a document to be published and available to the House after the Easter recess. It will be a comprehensive document and I do not propose to be drawn on individual parts of it until its publication. It will be important for people to see all the proposals and how they interlock before we proceed. That is the sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Trimble: I am grateful for the Prime Minister's information about the document to be published shortly, which he says will be comprehensive. When he has

[Mr. Trimble]

abolished the poll tax, will he proceed to abolish the last old rating system? Will the proposed new system apply to the whole country?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may be reassured to know that, for the moment, we have no plans to change the system in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down. There is great pressure from hon. Members to participate in the debate. Interventions take up time and will jeopardise those who wish to be called.

The Prime Minister: It is interesting that Opposition Members, after all that they have had to say in recent days, are so disinclined to listen.

I have offered the House five pledges about our plans. In return, we would settle today for answers to just two questions about Labour's own proposals. The Opposition's document says:

"These changes"—

that is, Labour's fair rates proposals—

"will mean that seven out of 10 families will gain."

That is a direct quote. The document says that that is shown by "independent research". I am very pleased to hear it. It is wise to consult and to carry out such research. The Leader of the Opposition is right to have done that, but if he has done it, he must have the calculations to back up what has been said. If he has the calculations, why has he not shared them with the House? Will he publish them? If his plans are in such a state of grace, will he lay those calculations in the Library so that we may all examine them? Surely the independent researchers, having carried out the calculations, will have given them to the Labour party.

Where is this document? How many of the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends have actually seen it? *[Interruption.]* Hands up, those who have seen it. I see no hands. That is extremely interesting. No Opposition Member has seen the document—not even the hon. Member for Dagenham, who told us about it. I do not for a moment think that the hon. Member for Dagenham would mislead anyone, so I ask him in a perfectly straightforward fashion, so that the doubts of everyone may be put at rest, whether he will put that document in the House of Commons Library this afternoon. *[Interruption.]* I am willing to give way for a reply. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us get on with the debate.

The Prime Minister: In reply to my question, I get silence. Silence is not only golden; it is instructive.

The second question to which every taxpayer is entitled to an answer is, how will the Labour party stop local tax bills soaring? We have said perfectly clearly that we will cap spendthrift councils. The Opposition have said that they will not cap spendthrift councils, so how will they keep the bills down? Will they make business pick up the bills, or will they just let their fair rates rip? If so, how will that possibly be fair for the taxpayer?

Taxpayers can be reassured, however, because the hon. Member for Dagenham came galloping to the rescue today. He told the *New Statesman and Society* that he has an answer; that he knows how he will stop all the over spending local councils. What he said was perfectly clear and very firm. It was:

"We would certainly do all we can to encourage councils to behave sensibly."

So there it is—there is the smack of firm opposition. This House——

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: This House is entitled——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has indicated that he is not giving way.

The Prime Minister: The Opposition do not like it when they are on the receiving end, do they?

This House is entitled to ask why so many Labour councils deliberately choose to set community charge bills that are far higher than they need to be. The answer is that those councils resist any measure to reduce local spending overall. They put political priorities before local needs. They put the interests of the providers before those of the public. The Audit Commission report? They ignore it. Cost-saving suggestions? They reject them. When new ideas are proposed, they do not even begin to understand them.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: No.

Part of our reforms must be to make such councils truly accountable, and we shall do that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

The behaviour of Labour council after Labour council has brought the financing of local government into disrepute. The story has been the same across the country —money wasted, services neglected, and the concerns of local people ignored. Which are the councils with the largest number of empty properties? Labour councils. Which councils do not collect arrears to fund the rates fund? Labour councils. Which councils produce the worst education system? [Hon Members: "Labour councils."] Yes, Labour councils.

But there are some things—and I want to be strictly fair—

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

The Prime Minister: In a moment.

I want to be strictly fair and there are some things that Labour councils do better and of which they do more. They do more town twinning, they have more foreign visits by local councillors, more nuclear-free zones, and more campaigns on international causes that lie well beyond the interests of local government. The Labour party has one policy on local government—to force costs higher. Over the past few years, too many people in this country have, sadly, come to know through their rates and community charge bills the high and bitter cost of living under a Labour council.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the Prime Minister is so concerned about the waste of public moneys, why did he and the Secretary of State for the Environment sit back for

weeks twiddling their thumbs while local authorities spent tens of millions of pounds sending out invalid bills? Was not that the biggest squandering of public money ever known?

The Prime Minister: If it were the biggest squandering of money, many community charge payers would be happy, for far more has been lost by Labour councils' activities.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I have given way sufficiently.

The fundamental problem remains: Labour councils spend too much. That is why in this Budget we have made a fundamental shift from local to central tax and that is why we will reform the system to stop the burden ever being felt again.

The Labour party opposed us at every step and now Labour Members challenge us today—not just the high spenders but the non-spenders sitting on the Opposition Benches. The Leader of the Opposition is concerned about the damage allegedly done to this country by the community charge. What about the damage done to this country by Labour Members who incite others to break the law?

The Leader of the Opposition censures the Government, yet he does not have the courage to take action against those Labour Members sitting behind him who incite others. The Labour party has no plans to keep local bills down. Those bills would rise even further because Labour has no plans to keep inflation down either.

We are winning the battle against inflation. The Opposition—no, I draw a distinction: the Labour Opposition—have fought us at every step. Every time we have had to take a hard decision, they have gone for a soft option. Every interest rate increase has been opposed. Every cut has been derided as not enough. The Labour Opposition's standard incantation has been Monklands law—whatever the prevailing interest rate, call for a 1 per cent. cut. They would have been better employed calling for cuts in wasteful and unnecessary spending by local Labour councils.

The Budget strategy is central to our aims for local government, not only in a switch from local to central taxation but in our determination to get inflation down and keep it down. That is as important for local government and local government taxpayers as it is for central Government.

Inflation has now been falling for four successive months. The next six months—*[Interruption.]* Wait and see; hon. Gentlemen will see the relevance of this. The next six months will see dramatic reductions. I expect a sharp drop in the inflation rate within two months. That will greatly help to ease in the new system of local government finance. By the end of this year, inflation will be down to 4 per cent. and it will go on falling into 1992. If we are to move successfully from the community charge to the new system of local government finance, low inflation is essential. It is now well on the way to being achieved.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall not.

Our inflation rate will be half its current level by December. That lower inflation is the route to lower interest rates, lower bills for local taxpayers and a fairer system, which we will introduce, for local government finance.

We have had four days' debate on the Budget presented by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, a substantial part of which was devoted to the reduction in community charge bills and, as is proper, we have debated that fully. We are now entitled to just a few answers from the Labour party about its shadow Budget and its impact on local taxation.

Labour says that it supports the switch from local to central taxation, but the Leader of the Opposition leapt to criticise the increase in VAT. Perhaps Labour would fund the switch out of VAT; perhaps it would not. Perhaps Labour has in mind raising income tax. In successive elections, Labour has pledged itself to raising the basic rate of income tax. Labour wants higher taxes, but these days it does not have the courage to admit how much higher taxes will need to be to fund its local government plans.

Local government finance is not the only place where Labour's numbers do not add up. As we saw, Labour's child benefit figures add up only if Labour claws back from the poorest in the land the money that it would give to others, whatever their income. Those on income support and family credit can expect no comfort from the Labour party, yet those are the very families that we have helped with £350 million a year extra in each of the past three years. Did Labour intend to hurt the poorest, or was the reason incompetence?

Can the Leader of the Opposition tell us what happened in Labour's shadow Budget to pensioners, Labour's highest commitment? They vanished completely from the shadow Budget—a very shifty position indeed.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order or a point of frustration?

Mr. Howarth: It is a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is very simple. At the beginning of the debate, you pointed out that the motion on the Order Paper was quite narrow and related specifically to the poll tax—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister has not referred to the poll tax.

Mr. Speaker: I have not yet heard anything out of order.

The Prime Minister: We do not even have to guess what a Labour Government would be like; we can see Labour in action in local government every day of the week. Labour has brought shame on the very name of local government. Labour has overtaxed and overspent on a scale that shows its unfitness to manage our national budget. Labour has left waste and chaos in its wake. No one could believe for a single moment that a party that has failed and failed again at local level could even begin to form a Government—Labour cannot even clear the rubbish properly at local level.

The motion of no confidence should be directed at the Labour party—no confidence in a party which will always be divided when it comes to standing up for Britain, no confidence in a party which would never accept the responsibilities that go with government. The House can have that confidence in the Conservative party today, tomorrow and for many years to come. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is very unseemly behaviour. Members of the House of Commons should not show their feelings in that manner. Those hon. Members who are not remaining will please leave quietly.

4.48 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Anyone watching the House on television or from the Galleries for the past hour or so would have been pretty depressed by the speeches that we have just heard. The speakers spent about 90 per cent. of their time excoriating their opposition instead of elucidating their policies. Any poll tax payer watching the debate so far, or reading the record, who expects to receive any information about the effects of either of the two major parties' policies will be sadly disappointed. I am bound to say that the past hour or so has shown us nothing but the worst examples of what is wrong with this House.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): If the right hon. Gentleman does not like it, he should leave it.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): So much cant.

Mr. Ashdown: It is about time that the House started to speak for the people of Britain instead of speaking for narrow, sectoral, party interests.

The Prime Minister broke from what I regarded as one of his strengths by making a speech that was dedicated to an interminable attack on the Opposition's policies instead of revealing his party's policies or their implications. He did that to avoid the necessity of explaining his own policies. The Leader of the Opposition did exactly the same.

Tonight we shall have a vote of no confidence in the Government and we shall vote in favour of that motion. We shall do so because it is impossible to have confidence in a Government who have presided over such a shambles as the poll tax.

The lessons of that miserable fiasco, however, go much wider and do not just rest on the fact that the poll tax has uncovered the failure of the Conservative Government after 12 years in power. The poll tax has also revealed the failure of the official Opposition. That was evident today, as it has been throughout this sad, sorry tale. More than that, however, the poll tax fiasco has uncovered the way in which the House of Commons has failed in its duty to the British citizen. But, above all, the fiasco has revealed the failure of the political system that allowed this to happen in the first place.

I wonder what the ordinary person, the poll tax payer, would say about the way in which we have conducted ourselves on this matter in the past four years? The poll tax is the biggest political blunder made in this half of the century. The other day, someone said that the groundnuts scheme may have been worse, but, to coin a phrase, that was peanuts in comparison.

It is not as though we did not know what would happen. We all knew the consequences, about which the Government were warned. Because of the arrogance that the Government had assumed in 12 long years, they simply were not prepared to listen.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way in a moment.

The Government were not prepared to listen to the repeated warnings that they received from their hon. Friends, their supporters in local government and all the experts. They decided to ram through the poll tax whatever. At the end of the day, they were made to listen by the people of Ribble Valley who voted for the Liberal Democrats in the ballot box. It is that which killed the poll tax. Let it be known that on that single night the people of Ribble Valley did what the Labour party had failed to do for four years—they killed the poll tax.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The people who did not pay killed the poll tax.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman says that it is the people who did not pay who killed the poll tax—what nonsense. It was killed at the ballot box, just as we said it would be. It was killed by the people of Ribble Valley, not by those who disobeyed the law or those who encouraged that disobedience. It was not killed by the riots in Trafalgar square and the non-payers—it was killed by people using their votes in the ballot box. At least that was how it should be.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I am reluctant to intervene, but the right hon. Gentleman started his speech by condemning both Front-Bench spokesmen for making what he described as party political speeches. I hate to say it, but it seems just a teensy-weensy bit as though he is now making a party political speech. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could change the style of his speech and go back to consensus politics so that we could all respect him a bit more.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman will find that I shall explain precisely what we would put in place of the poll tax.

The poll tax will be removed from the statute book by the people of Ribble Valley.

I do not follow the Leader of the Opposition's somewhat way out figures on what has been spent on the poll tax, because I do not believe that they add up. The most conservative estimates of the cost of the administration of that tax, of the set-up charges and of non-payment comes to £4 billion. Such is the waste that the Government have instituted by pursuing that tax for the past four years. That sum is equivalent to £120 for every family, and it is twice the cost of the Gulf war.

What could the nation do with £4 billion to improve education and the health service and to solve the scourge of homelessness and the problems of poverty? That money has been wantonly squandered by the Government on a policy that they knew perfectly well would not succeed. They were warned of the evident miseries that accompanied it.

To solve the problem, the Government now tell us that they will put 2·5 per cent. on VAT. Never again should the Government say that they are the tax-cutting Government. By a single stroke, they have raised that tax by a full 16 per cent. It is now clear that the Government will not spend money on building Britain's future, but that they will spend any money on getting out of the hole into which they have dug themselves. The Government are now attempting to fill in that hole, but they are doing so with our money.

It does the Chancellor of the Exchequer no good to pretend that the Government have ridden to the rescue

with another £4·3 billion to lower people's poll tax bills. The people are paying to have that money knocked off their bills. The Government's calculation is apparently simple. They will knock £140 off the poll tax bills in May and, in their gratitude, the electorate will vote for them in the local elections that month. I do not believe that the British people are that gullible. They know what has happened. They have the poll tax on the never-never—the poll tax on hire purchase. People will receive a lower bill in May, but they will pay for it for the rest of the year in instalments every time they go to the shops.

Never again will the Government be able to tell us that they are the responsible managers of the nation's resources. Never again will they be able to lecture us that they are the Government who give value for money. In this instance, the Government have wasted money more fruitlessly and to a greater extent than any other Government since the second world war.

We have been told that the Government have now chosen an alternative to the poll tax, but we are in some doubt about what it will be. Revelations so far tell us that that alternative will consist of not one tax, but the very two taxes that the Government derided when suggested by the Labour party.

Mr. Skinner: It is three taxes.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon Gentleman is right, because one must add the VAT.

In effect, the Government have changed the most unpopular tax in Britain, but jumbled up with it the second most unpopular tax, the rates. We do not know the fiscal emphasis that will be placed on those two parts of the new tax. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) asked about that the other day. Will the emphasis lie on the personal charge, or on the property tax? Are we talking about the rates with the poll tax added, or the poll tax with the rates added? The Government tell us that all this will be the subject of consultation. Well and good. We welcome that. But it is not possible to have consultation in a vacuum. The Government must make it clear where they stand on the matter and what they propose.

The absence of any view leads everyone legitimately to question whether the Government's proposed tax is cobbled together not so much for the good of Britain as to cover up the wide and widening divisions in the Conservative party. We saw that clearly last weekend when, on one television programme, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the principles of the poll tax would be retained and, on another, the Secretary of State for the Environment said that the poll tax was about to be abolished. Which is it? The country is entitled to know.

Mr. Skinner: Both.

Mr. Ashdown: It may well be.

There is an alternative. It is an alternative which the Government had available to them but which they ignored. It was recommended by the Layfield committee. It was not cooked up in some fevered corner of a think tank in Downing street. It has been used and practised with full public support in the majority of other advanced nations to raise local government finance.

Mr. Skinner: It is site rating.

Mr. Ashdown: It is an alternative which is simple, efficient, just and related to the ability to pay. It is, of course, local income tax.

Mr. Skinner: Oh, it has changed. It is not site rating.

Mr. Ashdown: It is the solution which the Government have, wilfully or otherwise, deliberately ignored.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I am moved to put a question to the right hon. Gentleman because of the interventions from a sedentary position in front of him. I recall at a university of Bristol meeting, when I was a student there—*[Interruption.]* It is not that far back. I remember one of the right hon. Gentleman's distinguished predecessors, a splendid man, Jo Grimond, arguing for site value rating. He condemned local income tax on the basis that it would have produced too acute differentials between local authorities. Local income tax might be 4p in Eastbourne, but how would he justify a 20p local income tax in places such as Camden? How could young professional people cope with such an increase?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman expects me to delve back too far into history. In a moment he will hear me refer to some rather more recent comments by members of his party on the subject of rates. I hesitate to ask him, for example, what might have been the policy of Sir Alec Douglas Home on the matter.

Let me be clear. We have published our figures. Those figures are available. They have been available to the party of the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) for some time. They show an average level of local income tax on average across the country of somewhere between 5·5p and 6·5p in the pound, depending on how it is calculated. I am happy to rest on that—or perhaps I am not. Perhaps I should quote one of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends to him. I could do no better than quote the words of the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who is now a member of the Government, on the matter. In April 1988—not nearly as far back as Mr. Jo Grimond—the hon. Gentleman said:

"With a dismissive sweep of the arm, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State"—

the then Secretary of State for the Environment—

"said that any attempt to raise local revenue by a form of local income tax was inherently impossible—ignoring the fact that that is exactly how the vast majority of civilised countries fund local government and that not one civilised country funds local government in the way proposed by the Bill."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 608.]

He referred to the Bill which created the poll tax. I could not put the case for local income tax better than that. I am happy to leave it in the words of an hon. Member who is now a Minister.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: This is the last time that I shall give way.

Mr. Douglas: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he make it clear that what he is saying may not apply in direct terms to Scotland? He will be aware that the Scottish National party put before the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for the Environment a comprehensive view of local income tax for Scotland. Of course, the figures are somewhat altered now because of the shift in the balance of taxation. A local

[Mr. Douglas]

income tax of between 3p and 4p in the pound could be introduced. Apart from that, I agree with the line that the right hon. Gentleman takes.

Mr. Ashdown: What the hon. Gentleman says is accurate, but he omits one fact. I believe that it would be necessary to maintain the increased level of VAT in order to introduce a local income tax of 3p or 4p.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I have been following the right hon. Gentleman's argument closely. As he says that he has carried out investigations and that the figures are well known to him, can he tell the House what the local income tax would be in Liverpool?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman asks me a detailed question—*[Interruption.]* Let me answer. Those figures are available. I can show him the document which contains the figures for Liverpool. I shall be happy to put it in the Library for the House to peruse. Unlike the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I shall do it this afternoon, if the House requires, so that it is available to the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and any other hon. Gentlemen who may be interested.

We have no confidence in the Government on this matter. They have shown themselves to be a Government who are no longer fit to govern our country by the way in which they have handled this important matter and brought misery to many. Nor do we have confidence in the official Opposition for the way in which they have handled the matter. The House has never had a better example of the negative politics which dominates our country than on the issue of the poll tax.

The Government and the Opposition borrow not only each other's policies but each other's insults. When looking into the matter, my mind was drawn to the words of the Secretary of State for Wales in 1990, when he was the Minister in charge of the poll tax. He said:

"Labour are all over the house, taxing bits of it. What next—a room tax? Window tax? bookshelf tax? three piece suite tax? What other bizarre ways will the Labour Party come up with to tax people in arbitrary, unfair and unworkable fashion?"

Lo and behold, what did we hear from the Leader of the Opposition on 12 March 1991 in an attack on the Prime Minister? He said:

"Does he want the floor tax or the roof tax, the bed-and-breakfast tax or the bedroom tax, the capital value tax or the extension tax? Does he want one tax or two?"—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1991; Vol.187, c. 803.]

The two parties simply indulge in banter and argue between themselves. They both say one thing one day and do exactly the opposite the next. *[Interruption.]* Yes, on this matter we have been a model of absolute consistency.

The present Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities said in October 1990, again commenting on Labour:

"Taxes on people's homes are unfair. Property values bear little relation to people's ability to pay. Capital value rating—which lies at the heart of Labour's proposals—would throw a tremendous burden on millions of households, particularly those in the south east whose house prices are high . . . It took two years to complete the revaluation of around 1·8 million business properties for our new business rate. How much time and effort do you think it would take to revalue 21·5 million domestic properties?"

For Conservative Members, here is how he ends:

"Rates were about as rational and fair as Russian roulette. No one with a conscience, no one who really cares, could possibly advocate such a system."

That then, this now. For that is precisely what the Government now advocate. It is exactly what was criticised in those terms less than a year ago.

We have heard constant complaints from the Labour party that the Government's proposals do not assist the poor over rebates and so on. But in its own proposals, the Labour party makes it clear that its rebates would not be automatic and would be paid only at the moment when the scheme was introduced——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I cannot understand what is happening in the Chamber. We were all collectively accused before you by the right hon. Gentleman of acting unreasonably in not addressing ourselves to the debate. He then rises and proceeds to do precisely that. Is it not just blatant hypocrisy?

Mr. Ashdown: I have explained in detail my party's proposals. Nobody who is listening to this speech or reads it subsequently can be in any doubt about the details of our proposals. We have provided them. They are published and available.

To return to the politics of the past year, today the Leader of the Opposition said that consultation was a "device". Earlier this year the Labour party was offered the opportunity of consultation with the Government, but rejected it. The Labour party refused to take part. It stood outside the process. Indeed, today the Labour leader said that to consult was evidence of indecision. You might imagine from that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Labour party was opposed to consultation, yet at the end of its document it states:

"The Labour party intends to consult widely on the basis of the proposals set out in the Paper. There is no reason why Labour should fall in the same trap as the Conservatives in announcing an immovable and predetermined policy irrespective of expert and political opinion or regardless of constructive observation."

That is the Labour party's commitment, yet from the start it has daily denied that in its approach to this matter. Today the leader of the Labour party denied it in his speech criticising the Prime Minister.

This is a serious matter which the House should have approached with more seriousness than has been evident today. We have no confidence in the Government or in the official Opposition, who have put their desire to oppose before their desire to represent the national interest.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No, I shall not give way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] I shall not give way again. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Ashdown: I should like to consider for a moment how the House has handled the matter. What purpose does the House have, if it is not to protect the ordinary citizen from arbitrary and unjust laws such as the poll tax? Yet the House has not been doing that. The House has failed in its duties to protect the ordinary citizen. What can the average person, considering what has happened in the past year, think about the fact that, when the legislation was debated last year, Conservative Members trooped through the Lobby in Division after Division to vote through the poll tax? Now they will presumably troop

through the Lobby in Division after Division to get rid of the poll tax. What judgment can be made about their judgment and interest in putting our citizens first?

Above all, the poll tax fiasco points out the failure of our political system. People are entitled to ask how we got into this mess in the first place. How could a Government of intelligent people served by a civil service which is reputed to be one of the best in the world produce the poll tax? The Government were warned. They knew perfectly well the consequences of their action.

In 1976 the Layfield committee considered the poll tax and said that it was unworkable. In 1981 the Government's Green Paper on the alternative to domestic rates considered the poll tax and said that it was unworkable. In 1982 the Select Committee on the Environment considered the poll tax and said that it was unworkable. In 1983 the Government's White Paper on rates considered the poll tax and said that it was unworkable. Not one local authority association, not even the Association of County Councils when under Conservative control, supported the Government's proposal. Nevertheless, the Government went ahead. The truth is that the proper process of government has been broken.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No. The hon. Gentleman must sit down.

At the end of 12 years in power, the Government believe that they have——

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: We have a Government now——

Mr. Holt: Coward. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you tell me whether the use of the word "coward" in the Chamber reflects on the character of an hon. Member? If it does, perhaps the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), who uttered that expression, will take the opportunity of withdrawing it now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was not sure whether the House heard the word. Confirmation has now been received and I think that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) will withdraw it.

Mr. Holt: You and I know each other well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you know that I would not wish to cast a slur on any right hon. or hon. Gentleman. However, when we are having a debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): This is disgraceful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Speaker repeatedly reminds the House that we are all honourable here. We do not reflect adversely on the character of other right hon. and hon. Members. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh should courteously and without qualification withdraw the remark that he made.

Mr. Holt: Of course, I shall bow to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and unreservedly apologise to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I look forward to him giving way to me.

Mr. Ashdown: Despite all those warnings and opposition from all quarters, the Government went ahead with the poll tax. They have inevitably reaped the fruits of their folly.

The Government have broken the natural process of government. They believe that they have a monopoly of the truth, and, therefore, that they had a right to force through the legislation, whatever the damage to our country and, in the end, to their reputation. It was government by ideological fiat from the previous Prime Minister. In so far as the present Prime Minister seeks to change that attitude of the Government, I welcome and support it.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: The real question is: how did the Government get the power to introduce the poll tax in the first place, when six out of 10 people at the general election voted against the party that had the poll tax as a policy in its manifesto?

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: The Government sought to impose this and other damaging policies on Britain, having received a minority of the votes.

Let us be absolutely clear. If we had fair votes, we would not have the poll tax. What is much more important is that, if we had fair votes, we would not have had any need of the poll tax. The poll tax was introduced to curb extreme left-wing councils. We heard the Prime Minister say so today. He said that he was continuing to curb extreme left-wing councils. Not one of those extreme left-wing councils would be in power if we had a fair voting system. Still the Government intend to blunder on. As a solution to this problem they will not give local councils a fair voting system. Essentially they will concentrate and centralise even more power in their own hands. They are using this as a cover for destroying much of what is left of our local government system.

Reform is necessary for the proper process of our government, nationally and locally. We know that reform will come only through the Liberal Democrats. It will not come from the Labour party, which intends not to change the system, simply to inherit it. I do not know whether the Government's difficulties are temporary or terminal. I do not know whether their difficulties are to do with the new Prime Minister going through a period of passing disarray or whether the noise that we hear and the sight we see are those of a great political juggernaut breaking up.

I do know, however, that more and more people will see the poll tax fiasco as a reason not just to change the Government, but to change the system of government. More and more people will recognise that the poll tax is yet another reason why the great programme of reform, which must be instituted on government, is now necessary both to the system of government and to the process of voting. As that movement gathers pace, the Tory and Labour parties will, as usual, be at the back trying to hold it up, and the Liberal Democrats will be at the front leading it forward.

5.19 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): As I was fortunate enough to catch Mr. Speaker's eye recently in the debate on the War Crimes Bill, I am particularly grateful for the further opportunity today to intervene. I shall make my speech as brief as possible.

I listened with great interest to what was said by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I am sorry if he goes away sad about today's debate. My own impression is that we have thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and both the major parties will go away happily to enjoy Easter—I cannot answer for the right hon. Gentleman's party. The only difference is that Conservative Members will go away still strongly grasping power and the Opposition will go away still vainly seizing power. That is what happens after a vote of no confidence.

One thought came into my mind during the right hon. Gentleman's speech. When I listened to his scathing denunciation of both the Government and the Opposition, I began to wonder whether his recent public commitment to a happy participation in a coalition Government with either side was really quite as valuable as I thought it was to begin with. I am dismayed.

The main reason I want to speak, however briefly, is to give the fullest possible support to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has embarked on an enormous task and faces formidable problems. I am sad if what I say disappoints all those Opposition Members who have so strongly and loudly supported me during the past 15 difficult years, but I am now in a position to say these few words. I believe that what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is doing is absolutely right—perhaps I say so the more strongly because I was one of those who previously said that the Government were absolutely wrong. In the debate during the passage of the Local Government Finance Bill on 17 December 1987, I summed up:

"The poll tax is unfair and unworkable. It does not increase accountability and will be immensely damaging to the Conservative party."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1263.]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is now limiting the damage and leading the Conservative party to recover from that damage.

The size of the problems with which we are confronted is enormous. Those of us who were in the House during the royal commission at the end of the 1960s and were responsible, directly or indirectly, for the local government Acts in the 1970s, recognise exactly how big the problem is. We were then dealing with Government structure. This time, we are told, we shall deal with all aspects of local government—structure, purposes and finances. It may well be that they are interlocking—of course they are. But the task of dealing with all three aspects of local government is simply enormous, and I see no reason why the matter should be rushed.

One of the lessons we should learn is that the poll tax was introduced without proper consultation or examination. As a result, the Prime Minister faces the problems he does today. Any change now requires the utmost detailed consideration. The same applies to the structure of local government. There are many different aspects of structure. What happened in the early 1970s—in 1974—was that we introduced a new structure for local government.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the right hon. Gentleman now apologise to the House of Commons for the mistakes that he made in the 1974 reorganisation?

Mr. Heath: It was before 1974.

Mr. Skinner: It was the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Heath: Yes, it was the Local Government Act 1972, long before 1974. One of the purposes of that Act was to adapt local government to the requirements of a modern society and modern technology——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It ignored the people.

Mr. Heath: It does not take very much to annoy my hon. Friend.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the reorganisation that we endured during his term of office was disastrous and proved to be so? It totally destroyed local loyalties, which we are now seeking to restore.

Mr. Heath: It did nothing of the sort. It established local authorities of a certain size for purposes that are required of them today. Where those changes have taken place in the past decade, they have done so largely because of bias and bile against local authorities. I do not want to go into detail, but if we take the case of London, there is now no structure for dealing overall with the problems of one of the great cities of the world. Ours is the only country not to have that. That was done through sheer bile against an authority which, at the time, did not happen to be Conservative. When we examine the issue of the number of tiers in local government, we must give the matter the utmost consideration.

We said that the poll tax would not be acceptable, and it proved not to be acceptable. I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister does not blame the Labour party for that, or those people who said that they would not pay it. The fact is, the poll tax was not acceptable to the public opinion of this country. If we try to put forward proposals that are not acceptable to the great majority of the public, we must remember that we shall get into difficulty again. That is a problem facing us in our examination of new taxes.

The problem with the poll tax was that it was based on a fundamental fallacy, which was the result of dogma. That was perfectly expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) who said that, in local government, the duke should pay the same as the dustman. That doctrine is not held anywhere else in the world except, I am told, on one small Pacific island. If we accept that dogma and introduce the poll tax, however many variations we try to make in it, it is bound to be a failure. The 1974 Conservative party election memorandum stated that any change must be in accordance with people's ability to pay. That is the essential principle for the whole basis of future taxation of local government.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil talked about local income tax. I hope that that option will not be dismissed too lightly by those examining the issue. It was recommended at the end of the 1960s by the Layfield committee and it is too easily dismissed. I believe that one

reason for our present problems is that the rating system was too easily dismissed with bogus arguments—I admit that, at times, I used them myself.

We asked how it could be fair to have a retired couple living in a semi-detached house and next door a couple with the husband and two sons at work, with both households paying the same rates. That would not be fair, but the fact is that that can be adjusted for fairness by a rebate system. That led us into part of the trouble which brought about the poll tax.

A local income tax was looked at seriously by the Treasury in the early 1970s. We now have complete computerisation and up-to-date technology, so it is possible, with great economy of manpower, to deal with both a national and a local income tax. The two can be clearly separated, if necessary by having one in the spring and one in the autumn. A local income tax can be implemented without any breach of confidence, because the revenue authorities have both the working and home addresses of everybody who is involved. Therefore, we could produce a simple system and people could see exactly how much was going into local spending and how much was going into national spending.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How does the right hon. Gentleman overcome the problem that was mentioned earlier—that the yield per person in Eastbourne would be greater than the yield per person in Liverpool? This is a geographical flaw.

Mr. Heath: That problem arises on every form of local government finance which has yet been thought of or practised. It is tackled by the adjustment of local government benefits from central Government. It always has been done in that way and it will still have to be done in that way.

Very well, we may have to accept capping of extravagant local authorities, but if local authorities are extravagant, it must be largely the responsibility of local people to deal with those local authorities.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): We have a London authority called Lambeth with massive rate, rent and charge arrrears, yet its people still vote solidly Labour. Can my right hon. Friend explain that?

Mr. Heath: If they like to go on voting Labour and paying those enormous rates—[HON. MEMBERS: "They do not."] They were paying much higher rates than anyone when they were paying rates, put it that way, and if local authorities like to do that, that is up to them. People who live in Westminster do not have the same problem.

I see the deputy Leader of the Opposition in his place. I am puzzled why the Opposition particularly asked that this vote of no confidence should be concerned only with the poll tax. I cannot recollect any other occasion in the House in the past 40 years when a vote of no confidence has been limited to one particular subject.

I can understand one reason, which is that on previous votes of no confidence the Leader of the Opposition has, sadly for him, failed in his attack. He roamed far and wide and got into great difficulties, and he lost his party's support. I suppose that, if one sticks to one thing, that reduces the chances of the Leader of the Opposition messing up yet another vote of no confidence.

That is one explanation. The other is that the Opposition are just not prepared, on an occasion when they are testing a whole Government, wanting to overthrow them, to discuss all the other issues today in modern affairs. Do the Opposition not realise that by doing that they are reducing the value of their own motion of no confidence? The country realises that clearly.

Why were they not prepared to give my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister all the credit for what he has done in restoring our situation in Europe? He has changed the whole position. Why were the Opposition not prepared to discuss the part that he played in the crisis in the Gulf? Why were the Opposition not prepared to discuss the dramatic step that he took in saying, within a month of taking office, that haemophiliacs will of course receive proper compensation for being infected with AIDS as a result of bad blood transfusions, something which had been argued about in a petty way for years? My right hon. Friend dealt immediately with all that, so why will not the Opposition give him credit for it?

I just do not understand, except that they are not prepared to acknowledge the good things that have been done in the past 100 days. I am, and I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues on that.

Mr. Skinner: The right hon. Gentleman has just received a handout as an ex-Prime Minister.

Mr. Heath: I wish to give my right hon. Friend the utmost support. Of course, I immediately acknowledge my particular interest as a former Prime Minister.

Mr. Skinner: How much is it?

Mr. Heath: I do not know. It is not something to which the hon. Gentleman will ever aspire.

5.35 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I do not think that I have ever heard so much nonsense in all my life. The attack that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has just made on my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was nonsense. I am amazed that the right hon. Gentleman should have changed his attitude so radically. From condemning his Government, as he has been doing all these years, he has now turned into an enthusiastic supporter.

A measure of the right hon. Gentleman's failure to appreciate the significance of this debate on the poll tax is his criticism of the Labour party for refusing to widen the debate. If we were to widen the debate, it would allow Conservative Members, such as the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister and others, to escape the consequences of what is really a political disaster for the Government. Therefore, it is our intention today to focus narrowly on the poll tax. There is no question of reducing the value of the motion, as the right hon. Gentleman said. We are increasing the value of the motion by ensuring that we debate the poll tax and its effect. It is significant that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) should start the debate by objecting to its terms. The fact that he too wanted to widen it is a measure of how worried members of the Government are about the House debating the poll tax today.

One thing surprised me about the defence of the poll tax by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. He said that he did not want to disappoint the Opposition with his support for the Government. I was not so much

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

disappointed as amazed that he knew what was happening, because every Minister has a different point of view. Every speech and every broadcast reveals an entirely different kind of poll tax, an entirely different kind of impost. How the right hon. Gentleman can be so enthusiastic beats me. The real clue to his speech was when he said that he commends the exercise in damage limitation. That is what the Prime Minister's speech today was all about. It was an attempt at damage limitation.

Let me tell the House what the nub of the Government's problem is. The poll tax is wholly unacceptable to the general public but Tory party activists want to retain the poll tax. That is the Government's problem. They are anxious to ditch the poll tax if they can, but their own activists will not allow them to do so. That is the reason for all the wriggling and manoeuvring, all their strange words and all their problems.

But I wish to concentrate on the effect of the poll tax on disabled people, most of whom are on low incomes. They have a low income and, as a consequence of Government policy, disabled people will have to pay more VAT. That is a serious attack on disabled people in view of their low incomes. Also, they will have to pay a percentage of the poll tax. As the Prime Minister told us this afternoon that that matter is still the subject of discussion, I do not yet know how much, but they will have to pay something. Therefore, they will pay increased VAT and some percentage of the poll tax, yet they will get no benefit from the £140 that has been offered. Disabled people are losing heavily, in all ways.

I remind the House that the average increase in male earnings in manufacturing industry in the past 10 years has been 20 per cent. The average increase in disabled people's benefit has been 1 per cent. There is no escaping those figures. Disabled people are living in great poverty, and this impost of the poll tax and increased VAT will hit them very hard indeed. It is easy for some of us to pay the poll tax—the well-off and Members of Parliament can manage it, but disabled people cannot bear this sort of burden, which is very heavy indeed.

The set of circumstances that I have outlined about increased VAT and having to pay a percentage of the poll tax will hit disabled people because they do not receive any benefit from the concession that is being given to most people. I do not understand how that anomaly can be defended.

The second major effect on disabled people is the impact on social services: the money that has been allocated to local authorities has been reduced and county councils are in chaos and do not know whether they are coming or going. Social services are absolutely vital for disabled people. They are crucial.

I am glad that the Government are seeking to remove mentally handicapped people from long-stay institutions. I commend that policy, but there is no financial provision for it. There is a shortage of beds in hospitals and in long-stay institutions and no proper provision in the community, and disabled people are caught—trapped in a vice. They have neither adequate provision in institutions and hospitals nor provision outside in the community.

Government policy towards local authorities is disastrous for the people who are least able to bear it. It is significant that the Government have deferred implementation of their proposals to improve community care and it is potentially disastrous to the people concerned.

Yesterday or the day before I received a letter from a Minister saying that the Government did not intend to implement certain vital provisions—I think, sections 1, 2 and 3—of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, what we call the Tom Clarke Act. That means that the Government are backing off from vital aspects of advocacy and assessment for disabled people.

I conclude with this plea. If the problems of disabled people have been overlooked by the Government, as I believe they have been, I should like my short speech to draw attention to them and the Government to think again. I must confess that I am disappointed with the Prime Minister because, as a former Minister for the Disabled, he was active in seeking to help disabled people. He did not do as much as I thought he would. In my view, as Minister for the Disabled he certainly failed to pursue the interests of the disabled as actively as I would have wished, and I hoped that as Prime Minister he would pay special attention to their problems. However, with this controversial poll tax policy he has not done so. Tonight, I make a plea that disabled people should be given special consideration because if they are not, they will suffer even more than they are suffering at the moment.

Mr. Dunn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber wish to take part in this debate. Earlier this afternoon Mr. Speaker ruled that between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock the 10-minutes rule would apply. Do you have any capacity to rule now, informally, that all speeches should be limited to 10 minutes, so that those of us who sit here until the end of the debate may have a chance of giving our point of view on this important vote of no confidence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not have power to add to what Mr. Speaker has already ruled, but I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will have regard to the matter that has just been raised and will try to reduce their speeches, which may otherwise go on at length.

5.45 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall try to follow the example set by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and keep my remarks short.

First, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on a quite outstanding speech, which both devastated his critics and substantially added to his reputation in the House and in the country. May I also congratulate the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), on his remarks. I agree entirely with his observation that it is extraordinary that this censure motion has been drawn up in such a way as to confine us to one subject. As far as I know, that is almost unprecedented. The only conclusion to which one can come is that the Opposition are afraid to expose to debate the other subjects in question.

Of course, it is true that month after month the community charge has dominated the political debate. There is no question about that—the debate has gone on

and on. What has been the effect on the political standing of the relative leaders? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been found by the opinion polls to be the most popular Prime Minister since Churchill. When Gallup asked this month, "Who would make the best Prime Minister?", 13 per cent. thought the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), 23 per cent. thought the Leader of the Opposition and 56 per cent. thought my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would be the best equipped. If these are the bad days, I cannot wait to get to the good days.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made as impressive a start to his premiership as it is possible to make. I concede that we have a secret weapon—the Leader of the Opposition. The smack of firm opposition will live with him for a long time. In effect, the Leader of the Opposition is our universal comforter—the parliamentary equivalent of worry beads for the Conservative party. There is no row yet invented that he cannot get us out of: Westland, the leadership, the list goes on. He is at the service of successive Conservative Governments.

Mr. Dalyell: Now that there has been a change of leadership, and since he was a senior Minister, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us the truth about Westland?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not tell us anything about Westland today.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am greatly tempted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) said, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the book.

I am not persuaded by those politicians and newspapers that argue that the old domestic rates system was the best and fairest system of local taxation known to man. That is not the view of the public, and we know it. In the 1974 and other general elections, that was a serious issue on the doorstep and the public wanted an attempt at reform. There is no question of that.

There is no doubt that the public deserve some protection from high-spending local councils. I live in two council areas, both, as it happens, controlled by Labour. In Birmingham, I live under a council that has squandered the £70 safety net in this year's settlement; in London, I live under a council that has lost some £100 million by gambling on the futures market, and whose only defence is that its action was unlawful. The public want to be defended against such activities, and it is surely entirely justifiable for the Government to act to that end.

I make no apology for my membership for a Government who sought to reform the position. Had I disagreed with their policy, my proper course would have been to resign: that is the only right and sensible course for a Cabinet Minister who feels so strongly about a subject. I am not sure that such people should have the luxury of coming back several years later and saying, "The policy may have gone wrong, but you may be encouraged to know that I was secretly against it all the time."

Nor am I over-impressed by the arguments of some of my former colleagues about what should be done now. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) talks darkly about the Ides of March; my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby quotes Mendès France. Mendès France said that to govern was to choose, but when it came to action the tale was slightly different. The big issue that Mendès France tackled in Government was the European Defence Community and the rearmament of West Germany. For that he allowed a free vote, and the Government abstained. That does not strike me as quite the kind of leadership—a leadership of firm decisions—that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby probably had in mind.

We memoir writers must stick together. The purpose of memoirs is to guide present and future actions. I am not attracted by standing pat on the community charge and pretending that nothing has happened. I am even less persuaded that we should raise all the money centrally; that would recreate the finance system of the health service. Devoted as I am to health professionals, I have never regarded the financial system and the management structure of the health service as the way forward for the 21st century. Such a change would entirely alter, and risk destroying the basis of good local authorities.

Nor am I attracted by the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby of putting 5 per cent. VAT on food, books, newspapers and children's clothing. Unlike him, I shall be standing at the next election, which may explain my caution. I fear that my right hon. Friend is getting a little demob-happy. It is not so much the Ides of March as the September song of a politician who has his eyes on a sunset seat in another place.

The actions taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister are correct. Whatever our views on the community charge may have been, the issue is here and now: what do we do about the present position? I support his proposal, and I applaud the local government review. It is right to consider structure, functions and finance together. That is sensible, and I welcome the consultative document that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced. I believe that local councils should be accountable to the local electorate; I welcome the fact that people living alone will not pay as much, and I believe in controlling the overspending of some councils.

The Opposition say that under their plans seven out of 10 people will gain. I repeat what the Prime Minister said: before the public believe that claim, we must be given the figures on which it is based. Like one or two of my hon. Friends, including the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), I remember the social security review only too well. I remember the response to the proposals that I put to the House, which was that we should provide the illustrative figures. We did so, and that is now what we require of the Opposition. They must provide the figures.

I strongly support my right hon. Friend's approach. It is a good rule to proceed with a sensible amount of consultation. Governments who do not do that often find themselves in difficulties. What has impressed me about the first months of my right hon. Friend's premiership has been his handling of some of the important decisions that he now faces. At times, the Opposition's real concern seems to be not the decision-making process, but the difficulty of challenging the decisions made by my right hon. Friend. That applies to a range of subjects; child benefit is just one example.

The Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) introduced many impressive reforms, and the country owes her a debt. My right hon. Friend the present Prime Minister was part of that revolution, and he is now taking it on. He has made an outstanding start. Let me make one prediction: his policies and his style will enable him to win the next general

[Sir Norman Fowler]

election. It is equally certain that those qualities will keep the Labour party in opposition—and looking for a new leader.

5.56 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The speech by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) may have led the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) to reflect that at least his Cabinet was rather more dignified and restrained in its utterances than the Thatcher Administration have proved to be. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has come back to the fold, having left that Administration when he saw the clouds gathering; the House will know how to assess his speech.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, however, is not only a former Prime Minister but a former Chief Whip. I suspect that that is why his speech supported the complaint made earlier that the content of the motion was too narrow. Such an important subject merits the concentration of minds. As former Chief Whip, the right hon. Gentleman will know that a broader debate would have allowed Conservative Members to be dragged in to talk about everything except the flagship that the poll tax was once said to be.

Lest the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup should believe that his Administration deserved great respect, let me tell him that the Opposition are entirely justified in claiming that over the past two decades the Conservative party has continually demonstrated its utter unfitness to have any responsibility for local government. The reorganisation of 1973 was probably the most inflationary exercise that the country has ever experienced.

At that time, we witnessed an example of duplicity. In his announcement of the rate support grant settlement immediately before the 1974 election, the then Secretary of State promised the House that the average rate increase would be 3 per cent., and that nowhere would the increase exceed 9 per cent. In many parts of the country, the increase amounted to more than 100 per cent. In March 1974, an incoming Labour Government had to sort out an appalling muddle; I suspect that, in 1991-92, an incoming Labour Government will be faced with exactly the same task—a task made unavoidable by the demonstrable incompetence displayed by the Conservative party. That statement can be justified, and I propose to justify it.

Local government reorganisation led to a substantial explosion in local government expenditure. The Labour Government were criticised for failing to control it. In March 1974, I went into the Department of the Environment as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Tony Crosland who set up the consultative body on local government finance. Local finance was very much under control between 1976 and 1981. That was due to a consistency and decency of treatment that led my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) to intervene during the Prime Minister's speech and point out that during the last three years of the Labour Government's life they provided 61 per cent. of local government finance.

Then the Thatcher Administration took office. No Conservative Member can deny that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said that the burden must be shifted from the backs of the taxpayer to the backs of the ratepayer, with the result that the Treasury now provides 43 per cent. instead of 61 per cent. of local government finance, which more than doubled, in real terms, the burden placed on the domestic ratepayer.

Then came the problem. Having doubled the domestic ratepayer's burden, the former Prime Minister then complained about the rates explosion and promised to abolish domestic rates. Despite all the warnings, which have been listed in the debate, not one of the right hon. Members who were part of both the last and the present Administration was prepared to stand up and tell the Prime Minister that there was something in that advice and that it would be stupid to embark upon a tax that would be as unacceptable as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup described it. He said that it was unfair to tax the dustman and the duke in exactly the same way, but the fact remains that the north country dustman was probably paying twice as much as the south country duke. Whatever may be the other faults of the poll tax, one of the major causes of its unpopularity is the degree of corruption inherent in it.

Some hon. Members will have heard me provide on a previous occasion a detailed comparison of the treatment of the city of Westminster and the metropolitan borough of Rotherham. The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities is well aware of the figures, because he has heard them from me before. In 1990-91, we found that, under the Government's inexplicable and corrupt determination, Rotherham was treated as one of the most prosperous and least deprived areas in the country. I have the largest area of dereliction and, in parts of my constituency, perhaps the highest unemployment to be found anywhere in the country, but Rotherham was regarded as more prosperous than anywhere in the affluent counties of Surrey, Kent, Hampshire and Sussex.

The result of Rotherham being told that it was prosperous was that that metropolitan borough, which has no reputation for extravagance or irresponsibility, received per head a very much smaller sum in grant than most other areas. By comparison, the city of Westminster, with a smaller proportion of children in its schools and a smaller number of old people needing care—a more compact area with a smaller population and with all the advantages that accrue to an area that enjoys the double poll tax revenue that many hon. Members, and others, had to pay—received last year 455 per cent. more per head than the metropolitan borough of Rotherham.

Despite all our protestations and the clear evidence that we provided of the problems that face the borough, in 1991-92 the proportion of support would have risen to the extent that the people of Westminster would have received 475 per cent. more per head than the people in the metropolitan borough of Rotherham.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman puts his case with his usual force, robustness and clarity, but we are debating present policies rather than what happened in the last few years. A motion such as this focuses attention not only on the policies of the Government of the day but on the policies of the Labour party. Is the hon. Gentleman convinced by the statement made by Opposition Front Bench spokesmen that seven out of 10 households will benefit from the Labour party's proposals, and has he seen the documentation and figure work that led them to that conclusion?

Mr. Hardy: I must confess that I cannot say that I am absolutely informed of all the details of my party's policy. However, I intend to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question. I had intended to do so, anyway, because it would have been utterly unproductive and unprofitable to sit down without referring to the alternatives. No Opposition Member can refrain, however, from uttering critical comment about that most appalling, wasteful and foolish exercise in British politcal history, the poll tax. It is an example of complete lack of wisdom and complete absence of judgment. It was an exercise which was cynical in its approach. It inflicted on the country and on the world of local government in particular an arrangement for the determination of support that was insanely and impossibly inexplicable.

The fact remains that a return to a property-based tax such as the rates has a great deal to commend it. It is economic. Vast sums of money have been spent during the last two years and will be spent during the next two years, whatever the outcome of the consultations. Therefore, I ask myself what could have been done with that money.

Despite the fact that my local education authority is responsible and good, as the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) will recall from his days in the Department of Education and Science, I find when I visit primary schools in my constituency that this year they can afford to buy only one paperback book for every 25 children. Then the Secretary of State for Education and Science has the gall to talk about standards. While such glaring needs exist, money has been thrown away on the poll tax. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield left the Cabinet, but the whole lot should have gone; now they cling to office and will also cling to the son of poll tax with the enthusiasm that they displayed for its father.

The Conservative party claims to have an interest in and a knowledge of local government. That claim has been exploded during the last 12 months. It claims to represent the rural shires of our islands. Only the other day, I received a letter—the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) may find this interesting—from Wentworth parish council—not a hotbed of socialist belief—asking me to speak and lobby fiercely in its interests and those of other parish councils. They appear completely and utterly to have escaped the attention of the Department of the Environment during the last three years.

I hope that at some stage—whether at the end of this debate or later—the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), or his more senior colleagues will relieve the anxieties of those who are deeply offended and disappointed by the Conservative Government's attitude towards the leaders of our rural communities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I shall seek to put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest right away. I believe strongly that there is an important role for parish councils. However, we must remember that only 50 per cent. of this country has parish councils, that there are community councils in some parts of the rest of it, while in other parts there are not. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said in his statement that he is looking at the parishes. When we publish our consultation paper in the near future, we hope to listen to the voice of the parishes which represent not only rural but urban England.

Mr. Hardy: But the Government have not listened to them so far. When the last local government reorganisation took place, the Government said that they were prepared to establish successor parish councils in urban districts, especially in those with a population of between 10,000 and 20,000. What they did, in effect, was to grant successor parish council status to every Tory urban district, especially if it was above or below the parameters that they had established, but they refused to give successor parish council status to Labour urban districts that did fit in with the Government's criteria. I could go on at length about that, as I did at the time.

The Government's approach to and handling of local government have been deplorable. They should learn to co-operate with local government because there is no more efficient way of administering services. They must resist the temptation to follow the advice of hon. Members like the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) who would centralise education. Centralisation is extravagant, inefficient and wasteful. It is probably too late for the Government to begin to work with local government in the way the Labour Government did between 1974 and 1979, when control was exercised without a large stick, through consultation and through good faith.

The sooner the Government put behind them the appalling record of Boadicea, who is not with us today—of all hon. Members, the right hon. Member for Finchley should have been present—the better local government will be. After the experience of recent months I have no faith that those who occupy the Treasury Bench, who were servilely obedient to the right hon. Lady and who bear the responsibility that she conferred upon them, are fit for office. The motion is entirely justified.

6.11 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I shall follow your injunction, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that of Mr. Speaker to speak briefly, if for no other reason than that I thought the motion was one of no confidence in the Government and I had prepared a wider speech.

I wonder why the Opposition have chosen to restrict the debate simply to the community charge. I do not know what the process of thinking and discussion was during consideration by the shadow Cabinet, but I can imagine the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) saying to the Leader of the Opposition, "Whatever you do, Neil, do not get tangled up with figures." That is no doubt one reason why the subject has been narrowed to the community charge.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The plot thickens the more one looks at it. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman who will be replying to the debate on behalf of the Opposition has nothing to do with the portfolio of Environment, but is the deputy Leader of the Opposition, whose concern is Home Affairs. Of course, that puts him in the happy position of not being expected to know anything about what Labour would do.

Sir Peter Hordern: My right hon. Friend has elucidated something for me and helped the whole House. I had no idea that that was the case. I had not regarded the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as a repository of knowledge about the community charge; no doubt we shall learn a great deal when the time comes.

[Sir Peter Hordern]

There was confusion about the subject for debate. I am not surprised when we realise that we have just had the best trade figures for many years and when we have seen the rate of inflation falling. We know that it will fall much more and that interest rates will come tumbling down during the year as well. Therefore, I am not surprised that the Opposition chose to narrow the debate to a single subject.

We are debating a motion of no confidence in the Government, and the Opposition want to defeat the Government by voting us out. It is a forlorn task. If they had chosen a general vote of no confidence, and if the Leader of the Opposition had made such a hash of it as he did on the last occasion, would not the party have tried to get rid of him?

It occurred to me that there might be difficulty about that, given the leadership rules of the Labour party. I do not know whether my right hon. and hon. Friends have had an opportunity to peruse those rules, but I have. It is extraordinarily difficult to get rid of the leader of the Labour party, not just because the trade unions have the largest block vote and the leadership can be changed only during a party conference. If the leader is changed, he has to be replaced by the deputy leader, none other than the hon. Member for Sparkbrook. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is to reply to the debate, I immediately thought that the reason must be that the Labour party is going to get rid of the Leader of the Opposition and is preparing the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to take his place.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman is not addressing the motion, but that is for the Chair to decide; I was about to raise it on a point of order. The hon. Gentleman mentioned my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). If the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) reads the history of my right hon. Friend and of his family, he will realise that they have been in local government all their lives, and that my right hon. Friend's mother was a great lady on Sheffield city council for many years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Both hon. Gentlemen are out of order. Perhaps they would do the House the courtesy of returning to the motion.

Sir Peter Hordern: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I should have expected the Opposition spokesman on environmental matters to reply to a debate which is confined to the poll tax.

I listened carefully to the Leader of the Opposition, and I distinctly heard him say that no more money would be necessary to pay for the Opposition's policy and that there would certainly be no poll tax. He said that there would be no increase in taxes. I do not know how a Labour Government would get more money, unless they borrowed it. That is a perennial problem for the Opposition. They are keen on spending, but they say that they would not cap local councils if they spent more than they should. Therefore, they would be driven to increase taxation or to borrow. That has always been the case with Labour Governments in the past.

I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) rightly claim in an intervention that in his time the rate support grant was 61 per cent. I also recollect that that proportion was reached by a drastic reduction imposed by the International Monetary Fund through Dr. Johannes Witteveen's letter—that admirable letter of intent—when he drove the Labour party to make slashing cuts in expenditure. The right hon. Gentleman was forced to reduce the rate support grant from 65 per cent. to 61 per cent. almost straight away.

Mr. Shore: There was a reduction from a high of 66 per cent. to 61 per cent., but the impression that it was the long-term policy of the Labour Government to reduce the proportion of Government funding is not right. The 61 per cent. was held for three years. I have discovered that, according to a written reply last year, the Government's rate support grant equivalent was reduced to 38 per cent. from 61 per cent. No wonder the Government are in trouble and will not get out of it easily.

Sir Peter Hordern: The right hon. Gentleman talks about a reduction which was not in his mind. It was Hobson's choice because the Labour Government were compelled to make the cut by the International Monetary Fund. If the Leader of the Opposition were ever to become Prime Minister, a Labour Government would undoubtedly fall into the same trap again. They would spend more, borrow more and fall into the hands of the International Monetary Fund. I am encouraged by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) nodding his head in agreement.

Mr. Dunn: In the lifetime of the Labour Government, the overall percentage might have come down for the reasons just mentioned by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), but is it not also the case that within the figures there was a bias towards metropolitan authorities and against the shire counties which distorted the figures? Some inner-city authorities got considerably more grant from the centre, and many shire counties got considerably less. The results are still felt today.

Sir Peter Hordern: Under the Government, the county of West Sussex has always done extremely badly by the rate support grant. I fail to distinguish between Labour and Conservative Governments in my disrespect for the rate support grant, which has never been very good for shire counties.

We have had endless debates about the nature of the community charge and about rates before it. What was endemically at fault in both systems was simply that the degree of Government support available was far too low and the bills to households were far too high. That will remain endemic so long as major services such as education are run by local authorities. Teachers' salaries have risen and are bound to rise faster than the rate of inflation. There is no party point in this. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney knows, the proportion of the rate support grant fell under his Government as it has under the present Government. We are belatedly realising that the level of grant to local authorities must be raised, and that is what we are doing now. I wholly commend my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on having the initiative to do that.

I am in favour of consultation. It is an important matter of courtesy and good manners. I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government, as I think that they are going exactly the right way. However, if there is to be a high level of Government spending in support of local authorities, the Government must have greater control over the expenditure of local authorities, particularly in major services. That is what leads me to think that it is now necessary to review carefully the role of education which is run by local authorities at present. I say that not just because of the severe financial aspects of the problem but because of the totally unacceptable variation in standards between one part of the country and another. It is a disgrace that in certain parts of the country it is not possible for young people to get a good education because of the nature of their local education authority. For that reason, I wholly applaud what I understand to be the Government's policy of devolving responsibility upon the schools themselves. It is also necessary to revise and review the role of inspectors and to tighten up the curriculum. My right hon. Friends are already doing that.

Far from today's debate being a matter of censure, it is an opportunity for me and other Conservative Members to applaud what is being done, the range of consultation taking place and the fact that it has now been recognised that support grant to local authorities has not been sufficiently high and is now being properly addressed. I wholly support the Government's policy, not only in this respect but right across the field, and I wish my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues every success.

6.22 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I support the no confidence motion, and I should like to explain why it has been related solely to the poll tax. The Government labelled the community charge their flagship, so now that they are in such a mess over the poll tax, the Opposition have every right to table a motion of no confidence.

I represent an area which has been capped under the poll tax legislation not once but twice. As I have said in previous debates, my local authority is not high-spending or profligate. It is a responsible local authority which faced immense difficulties in trying to implement budgets because the grant it received was insufficient to meet local needs.

The administration and implementation of the poll tax has been a complete disaster and billions of pounds have been wasted on collecting the poll tax and compiling a register which put the electoral register in jeopardy as people believed that the electoral register and the poll tax register were one and the same thing. There was also the cost of the shortfall in collection. I should point out that my local authority has already collected 96 or 97 per cent. of its poll tax, unlike some authorities that have been mentioned.

The poll tax was based on two principles—accountability and universality, in that everyone contributed something. Those principles have now disappeared. The idea of accountability was removed last year, when poll tax capping was introduced. No capped authority has been allowed to test its spending or its budget at the polls. In Barnsley the poll tax was set at £320. It was then capped for something like £270. Yet even with a poll tax of £320, one third of local authority seats were uncontested Labour victories at the May elections. There was no accountability but simply the Government's intention to cut local government expenditure by capping budgets.

Time and again in the House, my hon. Friends and I have attacked the credibility of standard spending assessments upon which budgets were based. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) pointed out the difference between the local authority in Rotherham and Westminster council and the difference in the amount of money that a local authority is allowed to spend to provide a standard level of service. The SSAs have been a complete fiction. The points raised by Opposition Members about SSAs have never really been answered. Standard spending assessments bear no relation to the particular needs of an area and take no account of levels of unemployment, deprivation or anything else. They are based on out-of-date and irrelevant information. As I have pointed out previously, the SSAs for my area are based on the 1981 census information and are absolute rubbish.

This year the Government laid down percentages by which budgets could be increased to avoid capping. The figure for my local authority was 7 per cent. There was absolutely no accountability; simply more management from the centre. As the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) pointed out, if there is to be more centralisation why not simply abolish local government altogether and go one way or the other instead of hanging about in the middle?

The hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) mentioned the revenue support grant and its reduction from 60 to about 40 per cent. It is interesting that the revenue support grant this year has increased by 1·9 per cent. External finance has increased by something like 19 per cent. The burden is on business rates and poll tax and not on the revenue support grant from the Government.

The Prime Minister referred to profligate councils and high-spending authorities. Councils are simply not allowed to spend profligately, particularly those in my area which have been capped. On the subject of profligacy, perhaps someone should say something about Westminster council selling off cemeteries at 5p a time and the rest of that lunacy.

The second principle was that everyone should contribute. Even people without any income were required to contribute 20 per cent. That could never be fair. Even now, because of the £140 reduction, the people in Wandsworth will pay nothing for local goverment services, yet my authority's budget is capped yet again. We simply do not have the grant that we need to maintain our services. So what price the principle that everyone contributes if people under one authority will pay absolutely nothing this year?

The idea that everybody should pay is linked to the idea of joint and several bills. Under the rating system both members of a joint household would have been responsible for the bills. It was a fiction for the Government to believe that only one person in a household was responsible for paying the rates bill, while everyone else in the household over the age of 18 was allowed to vote for whatever council they chose. Obviously, other members of a household would contribute jointly to its management and there is nothing wrong with allowing the head of the household to be responsible.

As I have said, my local authority has been earmarked for capping for a second time, despite following to the

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

letter the Department of the Environment's guidelines. It followed the guideline of a 7 per cent. budget increase. It also followed the guideline issued as the result of an announcement in December 1990 by the Minister for Public Transport that money would be available for the Sheffield light rapid railway transit system—supertram. Because of the removal of South Yorkshire county council, my authority, together with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth, have jointly to fund that project with Rotherham and Doncaster.

On a visit to the area, the Minister for Public Transport said that the money would be available. Yet, because my authority took the Minister at his word and thought or hoped that £387,000 would be provided in respect of our contribution for the supertram, we were marked down for capping because the budget was £387,000 above the Department of the Environment's limits. My authority was misled by the Minister in December. The authority was led to believe that the money would be in addition to the budget, yet my authority now has to cut its provision for child care in order to fund the public transport system for another area.

Mr. Key: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would allow me to respond to his accusation that Ministers have misled him. That is not the case. That is a complicated problem. I have spoken to local authority leaders in the Dearne valley and corresponded with them, as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We are trying to get to the bottom of the problem and to be as helpful as we can.

Mr. Illsley: My authority met last week to take £387,000 out of the budget that had been put aside for child care because it has to fund the supertram. Unless someone says, "Okay, put that back in your budget," that is what will happen. I am grateful for the Under-Secretary's offer of help, but it should have been made a little sooner.

Mr. Allan McKay: We shall be placing on the Table the evidence that the Minister has just described. The letter from the Department of the Environment can be read two ways. The statement from the Department of Transport can be read only one way. The statement published in the local press from a speech by the Secretary of State for Transport can be read only one way. He said openly that costs will not fall upon the community charge payer but will be entirely tax-borne.

Mr. Illsley: It would be helpful if, in the near future, the Minister were to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth together with members of the authority to sort out the proposals.

Mr. Key: I acknowledge the contribution made to the important debate on the supertram by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). I shall pass on that request to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful for that. Unless some action is taken about the problem facing my authority and Rotherham and Doncaster, the future of that transport system will be in jeopardy. My authority will not be willing to fund it by using money that would have been spent on other provisions.

That is an example of the problems of capping brought about by the introduction of the poll tax. The Secretary of State said last year that there would be a parade of bleeding stumps when we informed him of the cuts that authorities had made. Already, the fire service and police provisions in my area are below Home Office recommended levels. This year the Secretary of State boasted about a newspaper produced by the National and Local Government Officers Association which refuted cuts that had taken place in local authorities around my area.

In my area, we have sacked teachers and closed a music teaching centre, and charges have been increased or introduced for all social services provision. The light rail transit system is now in jeopardy and the funding for the passenger transport authority has put in jeopardy other projects, one of which is the reorganisation of my local authority's town centre passenger interchange. Those are real cuts in service provision for the people in my area.

This is a halfway house—a bed-and-breakfast tax added to a property tax. The Secretary of State asked the Labour party to take part in the review of local government finance, presumably because he wanted to adopt some of the proposals in the fair rates document. The Government are between two stools—abolishing the poll tax and returning to the old rates.

Of course, there is the £140 reduction, but that will only be for the better-off. People on low incomes in receipt of community charge benefit will not qualify for the payment because it comes off the headline rate. They are the hardest hit, but they will receive no reduction as a result of the increase in VAT. If it is right for everybody to contribute to the poll tax, is it not also right that everybody should receive a rebate when they are allocated? Value added tax is a regressive tax and the increase in VAT will be detrimental to people on lower incomes.

What is to happen in future years? The poll tax is not going away. Legislation to introduce the new system will take time and people will have to face the fact that the poll tax is here for another year and perhaps a further year after that.

The Prime Minister said that people deserve consultation. I agree entirely. They deserve consultation through the ballot box, and the sooner the Government call an election, the better off we will all be.

6.37 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): It is always an experience to listen to the leader of the Liberal Democrats. He is such a persuasive exponent of the politics of certainty. His speech today was no exception. Of all subjects, the tangled issues of local government should inspire the most circumspection rather than the most easy-going certainty. I say that in the context of the House grappling with the situation where, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) observed, what is desired is the synchronised reform of the structure, powers and financing of local authorities. A synchronised reform would be the most logical and comprehensive, yet we know from the experience of post-war politics that that is a holy grail with very little likelihood of success.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have been confronted with an attempt to fashion local government on a medium-term basis that will pay regard to structure, powers and finance, but not necessarily on a comprehensive basis. It is my view that, on any judgment, they have made a commendable start to that task, and I shall enthusiastically offer my support in the Lobby.

I shall race through my speech under the exigencies of time. However, I should like to judge the proposal by six immediate criteria. First, there is the necessity of increasing central Government's finance of local authority activity. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) is no longer in the Chamber, but he was confronted with the fact that he had increased the local content of local authority financing. He looked rather shamefaced about the parentage, but those are the facts. I am much more brazen.

I went into office in 1979. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who at that time was in charge of the Treasury team, consigned my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) and myself to the job of securing a higher local authority contribution. I remember the experience well. Confronted with this request, my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Carlisle of Bucklow, who was then Secretary of State for Education and Science, appealed to my heart, as, clearly, my judgment had been concreted over by Treasury officials. It was quite simple. My right hon. and learned Friend said, "Don't you know that people pay their taxes in sorrow but their rates in anger?" He was absolutely right.

We have now lived with the consequences. We have placed upon the local content of local authority finance a burden that simply cannot be borne politically. The tangled events of the last couple of years have demonstrated that. Let there be no misapprehension: we experimented with the community charge because the rates could not bear politically what was demanded of them. That being the case, the value added tax decision was crucial. Everything else that I say is in the context of the financing of local authority spending. To my mind, this was the most important single judgment.

Secondly, it was right to preserve the uniform business rate as a Whitehall determinant in local authority finance, and not to expose it to local authority determination. That very important decision might be said to amount to nationalising the structure of local authority finance. I am certain that, if we are to protect business from high-spending local authorities, which would use business rates as a way out, it is quite right that this type of protection should be preferred. It would be nice to know that it was underwritten by the Opposition.

Thirdly, it is quite wise to be modest and evolutionary about the recasting of local authority responsibilities. Inevitably, authority will follow money. If this House is to use central taxation increasingly as a means of providing local authority services, the functions of local services will inevitably be recast. I welcome the decision in respect of further education. It is the beginning of a debate that will continue.

We must be quite undogmatic in our approach to the question of single-tier local authorities. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) in his place. For once, the Liberals are aligning themselves with the more progressive House of Commons elements, whose Members sit on the Government side, in saying that that is an objective. We must have a rigorous system of capping. It is not possible for central Government simply to walk away from the total activities of local authorities. These will continue to represent a major sector of the economy, even if on an attenuated basis.

The most crucial element in this debate is the local authority tax that is to be established. I take no strong view on this matter. I am sad to part company with my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) in accepting that property will be an element of that tax system. When I consider how property is taken into account in the overall system of taxation in this country, I cannot say that it is treated unfairly.

I do not start by resiling from the principle that there must be a property element, but I quite understand that, in terms of equity, there should be some adjustment to take account of occupancy. That will not be an easy task, and I guarantee that the outcome will not be popular. Unpopularity is inherent in the system. In respect of this matter, I do not travel with the politics of certainty; I travel with the politics of nervous hope.

All of which I have said should be underpinned by a certain philosophy—insistence that the United Kingdom is a unitary state, and that we do not see a situation in which powerful disaggregated elements can challenge the authority of Government. I do not want to raise the temperature unnecessarily, but I have to say that this principle will be even more important when there is a developing relationship between the institutions of the European Community and this country. In particular, the Commission will be looking for points of reference within this country that leap over national government and find other ways of fulfilling and extending Community influence and Community finance. We shall be no less good Europeans if we wish to maintain the structure of a unitary authority, and we have that clearly in mind as we proceed with the reforms that are now in hand.

I told my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby that I would make a reference to his contribution to the Budget debate. That contribution was dramatic, and it certainly embellished the debate. I have shared office, including office in the Treasury, with my right hon. Friend, and I have warm recollections of those times. He was a good colleague, who has made a very powerful contribution to the fortunes of this Government and of the Conservative party. However, I should like to make a slightly dissenting observation about his speech this week.

In any political situation, I am the statutory vegetarian, whereas my right hon. Friend is carnivorous by temperament. It was in that sense—although it may have led to undue indigestion—that he approached the reforms that he had in mind. It is very easy to talk about the elimination of all local government. Would that mean all authority being attached to the money, or would some authority be subcontracted to be free of the money?

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): That is what the Liberals believe.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend should not incite me. I am merely saying what the questions are. There is no point in strutting in here, making headline remarks, and thinking that people will not bother with the footnotes.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has referred to the financial implications of

[Mr. Biffen]

changes in value added tax. A change from zero rating to 5 per cent. would result in a charge on books and newspapers, talking books for the blind and the handicapped, wireless sets for the blind, fuel and power, construction, transport and, above all, food. Let us not think that a Chancellor can breeze into the House on a Tuesday afternoon with an imaginative Budget and produce these increases for starters. Government is not quite like that.

I suggest that government should be government by explanation, government by trying patiently to guide, especially in this instance, when the Government have in mind a major switch in taxation policy. I am not saying that there should not be a switch. Indeed, the Liberal party, at one stage, enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a major switch towards extension of value added tax. This is a legitimate area for public debate, but it is not something that should simply be asserted from the Dispatch Box. That might be good for the Government, but it is thoroughly bad for the House of Commons. Consultation has been our tradition. Corporation tax, capital transfer tax and nearly all other major fiscal changes have been subjects of consultation.

The speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby was immensely unfair in respect of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. However, as usually happens in no confidence debates, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has emerged in no particular need of friends or allies. We have had the debate. Inevitably, the Opposition will believe that their best bet for the next election is this relatively narrow issue. They are almost latter-day Disraelis—Disraeli having had such great faith in sanitation as a political issue. This is the ground on which the Opposition have chosen to mount their attack. We have watched the debate, and heard the argument. The Prime Minister will lead, and we shall proudly follow.

6.49 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and to imagine him in Cabinet with the right hon. Members for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), and with the present Prime Minister. What a Cabinet that was. Even with hindsight they cannot get it right. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield paid a great compliment to his right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, and the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North made another attack on him. What must they have said to each other in Cabinet? Can one imagine the harmony that reigned in all those years in office.?

When the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North began his speech, he seemed to be saying, "Yes, local government finance is complicated and difficult and, yes, local government needs finance," but he was really telling the House that it is a mess. Who has created that mess? Who has been in government all these years? Who reduced central Government's contribution to local government finance from 61 to 38 per cent.? It was the Tory Government.

I was a member of Newcastle city council when the Government began all this. The education committee had to consider where to start making cuts. We began with buildings and moved on to school books. Over the years, we saw how things unravelled and how arithmetic, reading and writing were affected. A succession of Secretaries of State for Education and Science have tried to explain that away. The Tories are now talking about taking the education budget away from local government. They are saying that it is all the fault of local government.

If central Government squeezed local authorities over education spending, how much more did they squeeze them on housing? The housing investment programmes were cut, and what happened? The number of homeless increased. When the Government then came along with their doctrine about selling council houses, we found that the councils were not allowed to spend the money that the sales generated and that they had to put it all on deposit, apart from only 20 per cent. That was what happened when the Government began to squeeze local government's money.

However, the Government have not only squeezed local government on money; they have added to the burdens of local government. On 1 April the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will come into force. The provisions of the Children Act 1989 also have to be implemented. Who is to finance those new Acts of Parliament or the new duties that they impose? To implement even part of the Environmental Protection Act would cost £3 per head on top of the old poll tax figures. Implementing it fully would cost £12 per head. Who will finance that?

We have heard a lot from the Government about community care. They have said that care should take place in the community, not the national health service —what a fine concept. We have heard about how we should liberate hospital beds and look after the house-bound. All that is fine policy, but where are the resources? Where is the money? Will the Government find the money for that? Will they tell us today where that money will come from? No, they have no idea. They simply pass the responsibility to local government and, like Pontius Pilate, wash their hands of it. Former Cabinet Minister after former Cabinet Minister has attacked our motion of no confidence, but seek to wash their hands of all the rest.

Mr. Key: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's entertaining flow, but if his thesis is correct, can he explain why local government expenditure has increased by 25 per cent. in two years? He knows very well that the factors that he has mentioned, including the new legislation, are included every year in the standard spending assessment arithmetic.

Mr. Bell: The standard spending assessment was well dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), who pointed out that the figures that are used go back to 1971——

Mr. Key: No, it is 1981.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend said 1971, but the year may well be 1981.

I remember the regression analysis that was used in 1977. All the figures were poured into a computer. It churned around the arithmetic and mathematics, and out came the standard spending assessment. Middlesbrough was given a standard spending assessment and we tried to comply with it, notwithstanding all the additional obligations that had been placed on our council. We are

still short and will probably be faced with community charge-capping. The Government and the poll tax are confusion confounded. Not only do we not know whether there will be a poll tax after the review or whether the poll tax will be based upon rental or capital values, but we in Middlesbrough still do not know today whether we will be community charge-capped at the end of the month.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister will have overlooked the fact that in the 1990-91 determination of the standard spending assessment, Yorkshire and Humberside region lost about £500 million in central support while an equivalent sum went to the south-east, the richest area in the land. I suspect that my hon. Friend's area was a net loser in that exercise—as well as Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Bell: Not only are we a net loser in that exercise, but the people of Middlesbrough and my constituents wonder why they should pay more in VAT to subsidise the people of Wandsworth. Why should the people of Wandsworth not pay any poll tax and the people of Middlesbrough pay an extra 15 per cent. in VAT to subsidise them? Where is the accountability principle about which we have heard year after year when the cry of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury was "Make your local council accountable"? I may have missed out the right hon. Gentleman in my litany of Cabinet Ministers sitting around the green baize table in Downing street all those years ago. But what has happened to accountability? It has completely disappeared.

When I asked the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about accountability in Wandsworth last week, he said that there was still accountability, but how can there be accountability if no money is being paid to the local treasury? What about all the services to which the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North referred, such as books that have to be translated into braille for the blind? Where is the accountability for services if no one is paying the poll tax? How can it be? The answer is that it cannot be. All that we get from the Government is the confusion and obfuscation that we have heard tonight.

One good thing that has come out of our debates in the past few days has been the reference to Pierre Mendès France, the French socialist leader. I never thought that he would be so popular among Tory Members, Cabinet Ministers and the like. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield referred earlier today to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby, and the phrase "To govern is to choose". He said that there had been a free vote on German re-armament in 1954. However, he did not tell the House that Pierre Mendès France was the Prime Minister of the time who extricated France from its involvement in Indo-China, which was the most important and significant event of the post-war years.

I remember Pierre Mendès France for saying that people are not tools, and that they cannot be used as tools or disposed of as tools. The Conservative Government, however, have used people as tools for more years than we can remember and are indifferent to their plight. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said that about £4 million has been spent sending out poll tax bills that will have to be torn up. That is using people as tools and being indifferent to them.

We all know that the House is living theatre. We come into the Chamber every day to see the play acting. Today, we saw a former Cabinet Minister raising points of order before the speech of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. We saw flag-waving when the Prime Minister sat down. I kept looking at the monitor but it said "The Prime Minister". I had begun to wonder because I thought I was listening to a speech from a Leader of the Opposition.

I thought that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was getting some practice. He is obviously going to have a long time to practise in the future. It was knock-about stuff, but he said nothing that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment did not say the other day. I have read the *Hansard* report of the right hon. Gentleman's speech and know that the Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box today and almost quoted, word for word, the speech made the other day by his right hon. Friend. He did not answer any of the questions that were asked by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, such as who in a household is to be legally liable for the poll tax bill and will the 20 per cent. rule still apply? We may know in due course whether the rental or capital values will be used. But it is not surprising that there is confusion in the country about whether the poll tax is to stay or to go, the status of the new tax and who will be responsible for it, because, having listened to the Prime Minister this afternoon, I suggest that he is really the Leader of the Opposition and should be referred to as such in the House.

I was reminded that Stanley Baldwin ran an entire election campaign on "Safety first". If the Prime Minister continues in his present vein, he will say, "Wait and see"—wait and see on the poll tax, capital values, rent values, implementation, legal liability and the 20 per cent. The waiting must stop soon. Then the voting will begin, and we will see the Prime Minister as the veritable Leader of the Opposition.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that hon. Members speaking between now and 9 o'clock should limit their speeches to 10 minutes.

7 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): It is always interesting and enjoyable to listen to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), but I do not believe that his heart was in his speech. Those who listened to the Leader of the Opposition move the motion realised that we were listening to a void. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough has been a Member long enough and was in politics long enough before then to know that the electorate is not that gullible and that the Labour party will not be able to dance around the issue much longer.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced last Thursday that Cabinet had decided in principle to embrace a property tax, I wished to have the opportunity to speak out and in due course to vote against that proposal. I therefore tendered my resignation. I should like to place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, who gave me the opportunity to serve as Parliamentary Private Secretary from 1988. He is a man of infinite patience and kindness, as is recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. If I had been able to garner some of his wisdom, perhaps I would not be in my present position.

[Mr. Derek Conway]

My experience as Parliamentary Private Secretary was interesting. At first, I found Welsh Members, particularly Labour Members, slightly intimidating, but I came to know them as a rather good crowd. I confess that I was a bit terrified by my first Welsh Grand Committee and the working over I was given by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), whose bark turned out to be worse than his bite and who subsequently discovered that I, a Member representing an English seat, was required many times to keep the quorum in that Committee.

Many of us have observed the procedures of the House which, rightly, give Privy Councillors priority, but I had not realised that it would be such an educative experience. Perhaps its purpose is to enable former Cabinet Ministers to snap at one another. Over the past few days, I have found that a less than edifying experience. It was regrettable. We cannot deny, and will not be able to fool the electorate, that we are in something of a mess on this issue. Many of those at senior level who have contributed to this debate must carry the blame. So, too, must those of us who tamely voted for them as they led us.

As the Local Government Finance Bill was moving through its 188 hours of debate in this place, several of us issued warnings. I remember sitting around a table in the office of the then Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and arguing that we had to have a rates revaluation to make a community charge acceptable and that it was essential that we limited the base budgets of councils in the year of transition, or they would screw our backs to the wall, as ultimately they did.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen) knows, Shropshire left the rating system spending £140 million and now, under the community charge, spends £246 million. That is not the Government's policy; it is the action of the Labour Liberal-supported controlling group of Shropshire county council.

At meetings with Ministers, I argued constantly for single-tier councils. I do not believe that any of us who argued for that wanted the abolition of parish councils —far from it. Either the district system or the county system must go, and I should prefer the county tier to go. Whatever is left must be subject to rotating annual elections. My right hon. and hon. Friends cannot avoid the fact that we must abolish the community charge. When we introduced it, we were scared to go the whole hog, and we are now paying the price.

During the past few days, several of my hon. Friends have urged me to be quiet and not to rock the boat. Sadly, many of our earlier warnings went unheeded. Members representing northern seats know the famous Geordie saying, "Catch me once, shame on you. Catch me twice, shame on me." I hope that some of us will have the courage not to be caught twice.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his defence of consultation, is right to take that attitude and not be bounced quickly on this issue. Sadly, Cabinet endorsed the property tax. Regrettably, it may yet be called a "Heseltax" and haunt him. It will not work. Environment Ministers have put on record many words explaining why a property tax will not work. There is a proposal to calculate a percentage discount for occupancy. As no more money will come from central Government, we have yet to find out where the balance will come from for local government. Presumably, the jam will have to be spread even more thickly over existing property taxpayers.

The House cannot escape the conclusion that local government is spending £66 billion this year. With only £7 billion of that raised locally, according to the Red Book, and an administration cost of £750 million to obtain that minor sum, is it worth the bother for the sake of 10 per cent.?

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire, in a typically powerful speech and in the entertaining way in which he always addresses the Chamber, rightly related pay to accountability. What is "accountability" at 10 per cent.? Is it worth having? Perhaps we should accept that in this country Parliament has democratic control. We live in a parliamentary democracy, and we are proving this to local government by rushing through in the past 24 hours and the next a Bill to change the way in which they operate. That is proof positive of the power of this House over local government.

Yes, abolish the community charge, but raise the entire cost of local government through income tax, VAT and excise duties. Spread the burden and ease the pain. The no confidence motion will fail, because people know that the economy is on the right track. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is undoubtedly the best Prime Minister for which this country could wish. He pointed the way ahead in his speech on Friday, and I am sure that many of us will support his approach. But his suggestions are too good to risk. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor told the House in the Budget that the art was to pluck the goose without it hissing. I warn Ministers that if they do not grip the neck of local government finance once and for all, the goose will not only hiss but bite.

I still have no difficulty in voting for the Government. Although they are wrong about the property tax, this is a good and able Government. I suspect that their curse will be the property tax.

Shrewsbury has a long Tory tradition. This year, on 29 June, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Disraeli's election as Member of Parliament for the town in 1841. I accept that the standard of Member has declined somewhat—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] My hon. Friends are too kind. Fortunately, the standard of its people has not declined. It is a decent place and the majority are good, hard-working folk. Those who know me best in the House know that I do not regard Shrewsbury as a ticket to the House of Commons. It is a town where my youngest son and daughter were born and where my family, home and closest friends are. This bond has caused me to conclude that, if the choice is between ambition for office and serving what I sincerely hold to be the best interests of Shrewsbury, I cannot and will not deny them.

7.9 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway), having watched him in the Welsh Grand Committee abiding by his oath of silence and suffering those long hours. I am sure that he values his freedom now.

I congratulate everyone who campaigned against the poll tax, often at considerable expense to themselves. Good riddance to it. This debate is a bit of a shambles and

somewhat unreal. Local government finance is certainly in a shambles, but that is not altogether unwelcome, because that has been caused by the Government's attempt to disembowel the poll tax, which is to be welcomed heartily.

I welcome the £140 reduction in most bills—I should like to see the bills for those on lower incomes disappear. I am glad that we now see the end of the poll tax. I have some difficulty in understanding why the Labour party has confined its no confidence motion to the poll tax. To some extent we are at a burial service because the poll tax and the problems it has caused to our constituents are finished. There is no question about that. Many more pressing issues, however, will come on to the agenda.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wigley: I should like to, but time is pressing as we are bound by the 10-minute limit on speeches.

There are many more pressing items that will come onto the agenda in the coming months including housing, regional policy, the failure to implement the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, cuts in railway services, the astronomical water rates —a near relation of the poll tax—the disastrous high interest rates and the high level of unemployment. They are worthy subjects of a no confidence motion, but I shall confine my remarks to the motion before us as it is the only one that we have.

I accept that no one should have any confidence in a Government who introduces as vicious a tax as the poll tax. For that reason, I shall support the motion. It is worth noting that the present chaos has arisen from the axing of the poll tax—I welcome its demise.

The lack of confidence in the present Government arises from the appalling 12-year-record of the Thatcher Government. The present Government are only just starting to emerge in their own right, but I suspect that they stand condemned by virtue of their complicity in previous policies, including the poll tax, which caused so much anguish in Wales and elsewhere. I doubt whether the present Government will be able to strike an independent profile this side of a general election. The sooner we have that election the better, because all parties will then have to spell out their detailed policies. Sadly, those details have not been revealed in today's debate.

I accept what the Secretary of State for the Environment said in December about the need to know the future functions and structures of local government in order to work out its future financing. Failure to do so has been a common mistake in the past and it is right that we should grasp that problem now.

In Wales all four parties support the idea of a unified, all-purpose local authority. Given that consensus I hope that we shall be able to move towards that aim rapidly. There is also a growing consensus on the need to have an elected democratic forum for Wales. It is interesting to note that the Conservative Members for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) and for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) have advocated that recently. The need for such a tier of democracy in Wales has been recognised.

I regret that the Labour party, in its paper on Wales, has advocated such a level of democracy only as part of local government. I am not willing to accept that proposal, as it implies the centralisation of local government, while we want to decentralise central Government. I suppose that we do not have to worry, because the Labour party has said that that would not happen in its first five years of government, whenever that may start.

The principle that we should accept in terms of the structure of government is that laid down in the European context—subsidiarity. Decisions should be taken as close as possible to the communities that they affect. We should have an all-purpose tier of local authorities with the power to take all decisions—those decisions that could not be taken on a local level should go to the all-Wales tier, and then be passed to Westminster or Europe.

The Government talk about the need for answerability. The government of Wales is represented by the Welsh Office, which spends £5,000 million. The three Ministers at the Welsh Office are not directly answerable to the people of Wales, and that vacuum in the decision-making process must be addressed.

The poll tax was not introduced because of problems associated with local government in Wales. Successive Secretaries of State have acknowledged that the record of local government in Wales is not one of gross overspending. There has even been close co-operation between Conservative Secretaries of State and Labour-controlled authorities in Wales. There has been a willingness to reach solutions that are not doctrinaire.

The poll tax has been unfair to those on low incomes, disabled people, students and nurses. I informed the Welsh Office of one case—the Secretary of State for the Environment may also be aware of it—of a man with a disabled wife who earned £102 a week gross, £93 net. He lived seven miles from his job. There was no bus service and he had to have a car to get to work. That couple were charged the two full poll taxes. That man either had to do away with his car, and therefore give up his work, or pay his car licence and not the poll tax. That case was indefensible and it was wrong that the poll tax should hit people in such circumstances. The poll tax had to be abolished.

About four weeks ago, I went to the court in Caernarfon, which was a sad occasion. About 1,000 non-payment cases came before the court and only about 50 people turned up to defend themselves. We were aware of the difficult circumstances of many in the court that day.

I am sad to note that the unified business rate has not been abandoned, as the problems associated with that must be addressed.

My party wants a local income tax, and that was the policy we advocated to the Layfield commission in the 1970s. That tax could be collected through the Inland Revnue system. It could use the same personal allowances as the income tax and it could be pitched at a level of 4p in the pound. Side by side with that tax, businesses that are not incorporated would pay local income tax on their profits. There could also be a surcharge on corporation tax for local purposes for those businesses that are incorporated. The local income tax is used in many other European countries—predominantly in the Scandinavian countries. We could use such a tax. Who knows, we may yet have to reconsider it.

My party has advocated a structure of uniform authorities, but we also need democratic control of functions connected with health, transport and water. In Wales the water rates will become as hot a political issue as the poll tax once was. Water rates are now about £200 per household—perhaps occupied by one person. No

[Mr. Wigley]

rebate or help is offered. That is an iniquitious situation and the Government must address it. We must have a rebate system to help those faced with such bills.

The Labour party's alternative to the poll tax has many problems. Unfortunately, those problems have not been spelt out in the detail that I require. It would also take time to introduce the Labour party's alternative. It is interesting to consider what is said in the Labour party document:

"The costly shambles of the poll tax provides a salutary reminder of the need to undertake the most thorough and exhaustive testing before introducing significant changes in a local taxation system. We would, in any event, wish to consult widely on any proposals.

By contrast with the Tories, the advantage of the step-by-step approach which we propose is that it gives us adequate time after our return to government for consultation and for testing any new scheme before it is introduced."

Presumably we shall not get the full benefit of the Labour party system at once. One wonders how long it will take to get that system implemented.

I regret to say that the Labour party's performance on the poll tax has been appalling. I recall its lack of policy in the early days when the issue was considered in Standing Committee and the answers were not forthcoming. The performance of local Labour councils in Wales has also been appalling as they have rushed to implement the poll tax and to take people to court at the drop of a hat. Meryl Davies of the Rhondda was taken to court at 11 o'clock in the morning, and by 3 o'clock in the afternoon the bailiff was at her house. In another case in the Rhymney valley, a pregnant woman found the bailiffs landing at her door before she was given any attempt to explain her circumstances.

Yes, we have a lack of confidence in any Government who introduced a poll tax, but we also have a lack of confidence in the official Opposition who do not have any coherent alternative to it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): I agreed with a surprising amount of what the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said. I shall deal with some of his points later. In an interesting intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) referred to his predecessor, Mr. Disraeli. The debate today has shown clearly the truth of what Disraeli said. He said how much easier it was to be critical than to be correct. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government are trying to be correct.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, it is astonishing that we are having a debate on a motion of no confidence in the Government on one issue. It is admittedly an important issue, but there are many other great issues around. Perhaps the Labour party has no criticism of the Government except on that one issue. It is an astonishing admission that they have to confine themselves——

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: I am sorry, but I have only 10 minutes. Otherwise, I would give way to the hon. Gentleman.

A motion of no confidence in Her Majesty's Government can seldom have been less justified. The Prime Minister and his colleagues have been in office since November. They are already being challenged with a motion of no confidence, after a short period during which they have played a distinguished part in winning a war and have faced challenges which few Governments have had to face. They have introduced a radical Budget which will meet a great deal of acceptance.

We are having a debate on a motion of no confidence in the Government on one item—the community charge or poll tax—at a time when the trade figures are improving, inflation is coming down, interest rates are falling and the economy is clearly improving. It is an astonishing time at which to table a motion of no confidence.

Of course I understand the anxieties of those who are worried about the reform of local government and local government finance. It is an important issue, which we must tackle better than it has been tackled in the past. But it is absurd to expect the Government to produce final solutions to all those problems. If they had done so, they would rightly have been criticised for not giving themselves time to think out the essential answers to the questions of structure and taxation.

Everyone in the House knows that most of our constituents dislike the present structure of local government. It would be ridiculous arbitrarily to change it without obtaining other people's views. We would risk yet another local government reorganisation which would turn out to be disastrous. It must be right to spend time considering the matter and consulting.

A wholly satisfactory solution to raising local government finance has never been available. England hates local taxation. I suspect that Wales and Scotland do, too. Perhaps the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will tell us about Scotland, if he is called. Local taxation arouses more anger than any other form of taxation. The idea that the period when the rates were in operation was some golden period when we were all blissfully happy with the system of local government taxation is historically not true.

There was more feeling about the rates in my constituency and probably in many other constituencies than on any other topic of domestic concern. That is why the Government of the day decided to change the system. The rates were extremely unfair, especially for people who lived alone, such as a widow who had perhaps been left by her husband a house which was too large for her but in which she had lived for many years and from which she did not wish to move. The rates caused great distress.

I cannot tell from the Labour party's proposals what they would do to help people such as the widows whom I mentioned.

Mr. Allen McKay: We would provide rebates.

Mr. Channon: There are rebates now, and there were rebates under the rating system, but they did not meet the point adequately.

Of course, the community charge was unpopular, too. In the first instance, it was right to cut the proportion of expenditure financed by central Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) admitted that it was right to make that change. It was the total sums demanded which made the tax so unpopular and unfair. Everyone must be pleased that the bills have been reduced by £140 a year.

The leader of the Liberal party spoke about local government finance. As someone who has had the

misfortune to have a constituency controlled by the Liberal party from time to time, I can tell the House that, when the Liberals left office last May, they were proposing a community charge of £420. Thanks to the Government's activities, it will now be about £208. So the Liberal party cannot be acquitted of extravagance either.

Of course, we must get the new tax or charge right. What is there to criticise in the principles of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment? He wants the balance of funding to remain the same, so that the bills can be much lower. He wants protection during the transitional period. He wants—this is important—to make sure that there are no disproportionately high bills in high-priced areas in the south-east, where naturally there is great anxiety among many constituents, who believe that a return to the rating system would adversely affect them. That has to be arranged.

As the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) said a few moments ago, there must be proper rebate arrangements. There must be no excessive bills caused by overspending of local councils. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already promised that in his consultation document. He became Secretary of State only four months ago. If he had produced a consultation document earlier, it would have been inadequate, and sufficient thought could not have been put into it.

We are promised legislation next Session, either just before or just after the next general election. I am sure that we shall have a highly constructive document showing us the way forward after Easter. There will be differences among all parties in the House about the details of local government taxation, but I see no reason to assume that we shall not make proposals that are acceptable to the Conservative party and to the country at a general election.

Of course the Opposition can tease us about the community charge, but it was entirely right that the Government should reconsider the matter. The level of the charge made it much more unpopular than anyone imagined. The level was far higher than anyone had any right to expect when the Government began on that course a few years ago.

We are asked to vote that we have no confidence in the Government. I do not know what other hon. Members think, but I am brimful of confidence in the Government. The record on the community charge and many other issues makes me fully confident of the result of the next general election and that our leaders and our party have the right ideas for the next Parliament and throughout the 1990s.

We have heard little today from the Opposition of the detail of their proposals. I shall be interested to see whether the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) gives us details when he replies to the debate. I suspect that he may not, but let us see what happens. We look forward to hearing him later. We have not heard the figures. The proposals do not stand up. We still do not know how much the Opposition would raise in local taxes or, indeed, the detail of their so-called fair rating system.

Today's motion of no confidence was spurious. It has backfired, and I am sure that my right hon. Friends and, later, the country, will reject it with enthusiasm.

7.26 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): People have short memories. All the Conservative Members who have spoken tonight voted at least nine times for the poll tax. I remember the conference at which the poll tax started. The previous Prime Minister shot from the hip and said that the Government would get rid of the rates. Therefore, they had to do so. They had to do it so quickly that they made a holy mess of it. That is why the motion of no confidence has been tabled. The Government will make another mess of it if they are not careful.

It is no use Conservative Members saying that the poll tax has gone. It has not. The Government propose two taxes—one on property and one on the number of people who live in it. Therefore, it is a poll tax, because it is based on the number of people. If that is not a poll tax, what is? When people talk about the rates, they forget that the rates are 600 years old. For 600 years, local government or whatever system was in operation levied a rate on property. The rates stood the test of time.

We acknowledge that there were many anomalies in the rating system, but the Government threw the baby out with the bath water. They needed only to deal with the anomalies and get rid of them. They did not need to get rid of the rating system, which had operated for 600 years. They should not have done so until there was something better to put in its place. I spent 20 years in local government looking for an alternative to the rates. There had to be one. No one came up with one. No one brought in a system of taxation that was easy to collect, less easy to evade and fair up to a certain point.

When Tory Members talk about the little old lady who lives alone in a big house, they must remember that they introduced a Housing Bill which turned her out of her home if she wanted to receive housing benefit. They said that, if the house was too big for her, she should not be in it, and if it was too big, she would not qualify for benefit. They should not shut out that little old lady when she is not convenient and pray her in aid when she is.

When the poll tax came on the scene, the Secretary of State for the Environment refused to take it through the House. He knew then and has known since what problems it would cause. The then Prime Minister looked for someone who would do the job, and it had to be the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) who was fool enough to do it. As I shall remind hon. Members time and time again, on the first day of the Committee, we said to the Government, "For heaven's sake, take the Bill away. Let us get down to looking for an alternative. Let us shove those alternatives through any machinery you like and come up with a system of local government taxation that will stand the test of time, as the rates have stood that test for 600 years."

But no, the arrogance of the Government at that time was like the arrogance of the Government now in introducing this new system. They did not want to know or talk about it. The legislation was their flagship. When it was introduced in the House, Tory Members all waved their Order Papers. They thought, "Great, we've got something. Eureka." They did have something and it was eureka, but it was not based on the ability to pay or on fairness. It was easy to evade and hard to collect—by God, it was expensive to collect.

[Mr. Allen McKay]

The rating system cost my local authority £972,000. The first year of the poll tax cost it £1,900,000, and the second year £1,900,000. It cost £1·3 million to install the software to run the poll tax system. Now the authority has a revenue problem of £900,000 from installing the system. That is as much as it cost to collect the rates. That is why we have tabled a censure motion. The Government are running into exactly the same problem again.

We do not know what the system will be, but we know what system we should like—one based on the ability to pay. I shall again be the first to say that everybody who can afford it should help to pay for local government. Yet, what is happening in Wandsworth? Who is paying there? If my local authority got the same grant as Wandsworth, it would be giving £10 to everybody. Not only would everybody in the authority not have to pay, but it would give them £10.

A new system is to be introduced, and the censure motion is tabled because areas such as Wandsworth will live off the backs of others. Wandsworth intends to provide schools and all the other local authority services free of charge. The money must come from somewhere. My old dad had a saying that nobody gets nowt for nowt, but Wandsworth is getting summat and somebody else is paying for it. Sadly, that is what is happening.

The 20 per cent. is ridiculous. It costs more to collect it than it is worth. Why should local authorities have to collect it? When we asked the Minister of State, he said that, if the 20 per cent. was not collected, it would be up to the auditor. What a foreign thing for him to say. In effect, he was saying that if it costs too much to collect, and we use our common sense and do not collect it, but the auditor says that it should be collected, the authority will be surcharged. Yet that is the guidance that came from the Government. They cannot argue that local government must co-operate with and obey central Government, if the Government do not say what local government should be doing except when it suits them.

We have tabled the censure motion because the Government have ruined local government. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) spelled out a great many matters and I shall spell out one or two more. People liked the old rating system because it was easy to collect and less easy to evade, and everybody paid because it was based on property which does not move up and down. The problem with the poll tax is that authorities cannot keep a check of the people on the register. If the register were different, it would still be as bad and as costly.

Another problem is that local authorities can no longer provide their services. In Barnsley, under the rating system, physically and partly mentally handicapped people had a job provided by the local authority. Their produce was sold and at the end of the week they got their £4 wage packet, so they felt that they had a place in society. Now the authority must charge them £1·50 a day to go to work because of the poll tax. Without the poll tax, the charge would be nil.

I have no argument with any Government, whatever their political persuasion, for saying how much money they will supply to local authorities, but thereafter local authorities should be accountable to their electors for the services that they provide with the rest of the money. Where is accountability now, and all that was rammed down our throat in Committee? The Government said that they were introducing the tax to increase accountability. There was no accountability. It was all a whitewash. The Government introduced the poll tax because they thought that the local authorities would be blamed. The Government are in a mess because local authorities and many other people realise that the blame lies with the Government Front Bench. That is why the Government are having to change the system.

If the Secretary of State wants to see how a good local authority is run, he should come and see ours. The books are open and the system is available. Every year, a third of the council is elected. The councillors hold surgeries every Saturday. The local populace are consulted before an increase in rates. That is the way to run a local authority.

The Secretary of State and the Government have killed that system because of their hatred of local authorities. We know why they started on it and why they brought in the poll tax. It has nothing to do with local authority inefficiency: it was because they could not run local authorities exactly as they wanted. The Government talk about consultation, but consultation should have come first, not as a second thought.

7.36 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). In his strong commitment to the rating system, he should recall that revaluation is crucial to its efficiency and success. Revaluation was last done by the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). Under the Governments of Lord Wilson and Lord Callaghan, no revaluation took place, and we know why. None has taken place since. It is because of the consequences on the market value of housing and the poundage of the rates in a high inflationary period. Tonnage and poundage was a happy little tax in its day, but rateage without poundage is not too easy to tax either.

We are discussing a motion of no confidence, yet there are not many Labour Members present on the Opposition Benches. *[Interruption.]* This is supposed to be the big setpiece debate before we go on our Easter holidays, yet there does not seem to be much support for the motion. *[Interruption.]* There has been much criticism of the motion, but I do not hold with it. It is rather a good one. It states:

"That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government in the light of its inability to rectify the damage done to the British people by the poll tax."

About the one thing that can be said is that from day one of my right hon. Friend becoming leader of the party and Prime Minister, action was taken on the poll tax. From day one, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) joined the Government—I am delighted to see him return to the Department of the Environment—the problem of the poll tax was addressed.

In the 100 days of dealing with the problems associated with the replacement of that tax, several things immediately happened. First, a new scheme for the community charge reduction was immediately introduced at double the scale of expenditure involved in the previous transitional scheme, so that one out of every two charge payers would be able to benefit. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made major efforts to deal

with the existing tax and a proposed successor tax. Thirdly, he it was who said early on that it was impossible to deal with the individual matter of local government finance without, at the same time, looking at local government structure and functions.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment have agreed on what should be done about those three issues. They agreed that there should be consultation. For some reason that I do not understand, consultation has become almost a dirty word among some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was upset about it. He is not present this evening, which is entirely my fault because I did not let him know that I was going to address the House—otherwise he would be here. I was surprised that he was against consultation. I thought that he was now officially engaged as a consultant to a major bank, Barclays. It sounds as though his consultation may not get far if he does not believe in it, but that bank is not the listening bank.

There are other problems associated with consultation. There would be absolutely no reason in proceeding to refine local government structure, financing and functions without thorough consultation with those who matter a great deal, not just the public, but those who run local government. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be setting about that shortly after the Easter break. The publication of what is required will be laid before the public to give them a chance to comment on the options, refine the system and, in the light of consultation, definite decisions will be taken.

That seems a far preferable way to go about the process. It reflects the widespread feeling of hon. Members who have spoken tonight that the Government cannot afford to ride roughshod over public opinion with a new and unproven system and enter it in the list as a successor to the community charge.

We must refine the alternative, and take it carefully. I should be happy if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agreed to take it slowly. There is no need to rush the issue because we know, and the House knows, that the community charge has to be in place for at least two years before new legislation to introduce a new system can become effective. That is why, in the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced a massive shift of £4·25 billion into local authority financing—there have been no complaints about that from any hon. Members.

That action has ensured that the reduction in the community charge of £140 for the coming two years will be in place. If that is not a response, in the terms of the Opposition motion,

"to rectify the damage done",

I do not know what is. The motion is a non-starter, because action has already been taken to finance the tax, and matters are in train to determine the future system that will be necessary.

The Opposition chose the motion for another reason, as has been said by my right hon. and hon. Friends. On other issues—the wider parameters of government and what has happened in the 100 days that the Government have been in power—there has been a remarkable series of successes. After only 100 days in office, the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been shown to be a fantastic success. That is true in terms of his handling of the Gulf crisis and the completely new system of European relations that has been established, in particular the relationships with the German republic—which are now on a level where speaking and listening are part and parcel of the membership of the Community. In addition, he has developed relationships with Moscow and President Bush and travelled to Moscow, the Gulf and in the west. All that has been done in 100 days. He has also made major shifts in policy in relation to child benefit and other social expenditure matters such as dealing with haemophiliacs.

My right hon. Friend faces his first vote of no confidence as Prime Minister, but it is absolutely no contest. My right hon. Friend has demonstrated his capacity to lead and to succeed. The Conservative party certainly takes for certain both his leadership and his ultimate victory at the election.

7.45 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): In the past, confidence motions have been tabled because Governments lack majorities, as in 1979, or because they have made appalling messes throughout their term of office, or on single issues, as in 1940 over the failure of the campaign in Norway. It is not a new idea to have a no confidence vote on a single issue.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): It is the first time in living memory that a no confidence motion has been tabled in such narrow terms.

Mr. Radice: I have not looked at the 1940 motion, but I have certainly looked at the debate, which was on the Norwegian campaign.

However, most hon. Members agree that the introduction of the poll tax was a blunder. Most of them also agree—I have been talking to quite a few Conservative Members during the past few weeks—that the way that the Government are handling the disposal of the poll tax is also pretty disastrous. In the short time available, I shall devote my speech to considering what their handling of the poll tax reveals about the Conservative Government. We are perfectly entitled to table a no confidence motion, because the Government's handling of the poll tax reveals that they are no longer fit to govern.

I shall consider the Government's handling of the issue under separate headings. The first is what it reveals about their competence. They must be extremely incompetent to introduce such a foolish tax, one which is now recognised, even by Conservatives, to be pretty disastrous. The Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted before the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service that it was a regressive tax. Certainly Ministers were not saying that a year or so ago, but they are admitting it now.

Secondly, the tax has been extraordinarily difficult to collect. It is not a matter of the persuasive power of one or two hon. Members or the anti-poll tax campaign. Hon. Members know well—the Prime Minister has admitted as much in the secrecy of the Cabinet—that many people could not afford to pay the poll tax. That was the problem with it, which was why it was difficult to collect.

Thirdly, it was administratively very expensive. It was twice as expensive to collect as the rates. If we look at all the new buildings that had to be built in every local authority to cope with the collection of the poll tax, we can see why.

[Mr. Radice]

It was incompetent to introduce such a foolish tax and incompetent to persist with it when it became clear what a foolish tax it was and how widespread hostility to it was, as shown by public opinion polls and successive by-elections. Ribble Valley was not the first by-election to be fought on the tax. The Mid-Staffordshire by-election was a poll tax by-election that was won decisively by the Labour party. But the Government persisted in the poll tax and then tried to mitigate its effects by throwing money at it.

That was a disastrous failure. If they had spent some of that money on improving services rather than trying to buy popularity for the poll tax, we would be in a better state today.

I also submit that the Government are incompetent because they have not completely abolished the poll tax. Instead, they are producing this fudged compromise—even Conservative Members know very well that it is a fudged compromise—between two different types of tax, a property tax and "son of poll tax," as the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) called it a few days ago. As the Government have proved themselves incompetent on that scale, I submit that they are not fit to govern.

The Government are also divided. We have had plenty of evidence of that. In a sense, the battles of the Thatcher Cabinet are being fought out publicly. The right hon. Member for Blaby said that he was against the poll tax and had argued against it in Cabinet. He thought that it was a bad idea. The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) told us in *The Times* today what an excellent tax it was. If only the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been prepared to give him a bit of money, it would have been successful.

But there is also a division within the Cabinet. Let us be honest about that. We know perfectly well that the Secretary of State for the Environment is in favour of a property tax. He does not believe in a poll tax element. As a faithful member of the Conservative party, he will argue faithfully for it, but he does not believe in it. He has to do that in order to reconcile other elements in the Cabinet, such as the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who still believe that there should be a poll tax element. I believe that the Chancellor thinks that as well.

That division reflects a wider division in the Conservative party in the House of Commons, between those who want completely to abolish the poll tax, some of whom I can see here, and those who want to retain an element of the poll tax. Therefore, the Conservative party is very much a quarrelling, factional party. Many groups with strange titles are now cropping up. I am reminded of the Labour party in the early 1980s. Some Conservative Members feel so strongly about issues such as the poll tax that they do not even want the Conservative party to win the general election. That is the state that they have got themselves into. Because they are divided in that way, they are not fit to govern.

Finally, I want to consider what the poll tax reveals about the leadership of the Conservative party. It shows that the Prime Minister is not prepared to take decisions. He was elected primarily by right-wing Members of Parliament; that is why he beat the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). He had their support and he owes them some favours. He has to appease them. The majority of the people who elected him still want a poll tax element.

Rather than produce an effective system of local taxation, the Prime Minister has chosen to appease the right-wing Members who elected him, and is trying to obtain the lowest common denominator of agreement inside his Cabinet. That is why we have this fudged compromise, which does not satisfy anybody in the Conservative party, will not be a runner in the country and will not provide a lasting tax for local government.

We do not even know the details of the new tax. We do not know what element will be a property tax and what element will be the poll tax, as the right hon. Member for Blaby justly pointed out. There is an electoral reason for our not being given such details. The Conservative party is worried about the winners and losers, so it wants to keep the details quiet until after the next general election. That is clear, so let us not have too much high-minded talk about consultation. There are some rather low-minded reasons for the silence as well. I therefore submit that the handling of the poll tax reveals some pretty weak leadership at the top of the Conservative party.

We are entirely right to move a motion of no confidence, not just because the poll tax is a bad tax, not just because it looks as though what will succeed it will also be a bad tax, but because of what it reveals about the Government—their incompetence and division, and the fact that they remain extremely weakly led.

The Opposition were right to table a motion of no confidence, and I shall be delighted to support it in the Lobby tonight. I hope that soon we will be able to go to the country and test people's confidence in the Government as well.

7.54 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has done his best to make our flesh creep with his gloomy forebodings about what damage is being done to the Conservative party, but I can assure him that most of my right hon. and hon. Friends see this afternoon's events very differently.

It needs to be said at the outset that the Opposition's motion of no confidence has been great fun and has given my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a great debating triumph. I for one would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for making it possible.

Mr. John P. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should wait until he sees the television coverage.

Mr. Aitken: I shall come to that in a moment.

As I listened to the opening of the debate, I remembered a little-known fact about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In his school days he was an avid and devoted fan of the literary works of Mr. Frank Richards, the creator of Billy Bunter. That otherwise irrelevant piece of information struck me because, as I listened to the Leader of the Opposition, I realised that this was not a serious parliamentary occasion at all, let alone a great one. We were back in the atmosphere of Greyfriars school with old Carrot Top, his close friend the fat boy and all the other rotters of the lower sixth. They were trying to organise a good old pillow fight in the dorm the night before the school broke up for the Easter hols. That was the spirit of this allegedly serious no confidence debate.

But that pillow fight strategy badly misfired. Connoisseurs of the Leader of the Opposition's performances on these occasions know that he defies the law of averages. His censure motions always misfire. Those who remember the Westland debate and other no confidence motions know that he is a tonic for the Conservative party. He always sends us off more invigorated and united than we were before he tabled his no confidence motion.

This debate has been more helpful than all the others. This must be the first censure motion in the history of Parliament ever to be tabled against the Government because they are abolishing an unpopular tax entirely in accordance with the wishes of the electorate. I was amazed by the Opposition's tactics. They moved a censure motion today, but did not even dare vote against the measure that we debated last night which shovelled £140 off the poll tax for every citizen in the country.

The Government's actions have been commendable. They have followed the philosophical and principled advice of the great Tory democrat, Lord Randolph Churchill, who used to say:

"Listen to the people. Trust the people. That is the watchword of Tory democracy."

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown commendable courage after only four months at No. 10 Downing street in listening to the people and trusting the people in abolishing the much-disliked poll tax. He should be praised, not censured.

The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) seemed to gain some comfort from the television coverage of the debate. It is true that the BBC is calling this afternoon's debate a draw. Most ordinary mortals would translate that BBC English into the knowledge that it must have been a great triumph for Her Majesty's Government.

But perhaps the verb "to draw" is relevant in one sense. The debate will have drawn the sting of this great poll tax controversy. I suspect that we have reached the climax of poll tax fever with this debate. I have sensed for some weeks now that there has been a certain artificiality in the last few deathbed scenes of the poll tax drama. The Ribble Valley by-election was a one-off freak, in that there are a large number of low-rated houses in that constituency.

That is a situation which I understand well, because the principal town in my constituency, Ramsgate, is rather like a north-east town transplanted to south-east England and it has a large number of low-income people, with low-rated houses, who have thoroughly disliked the poll tax. They like what the Government have been doing about this issue in recent weeks. They certainly liked the community charge reduction scheme, which was to cut their poll tax bills by approximately 20 per cent. They liked the Budget, which will take £140 off their poll tax bills. They liked the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) that the poll tax will be completely abolished.

My constituents understand perfectly well that a new local tax will require some further consultation before details and precise figures are announced. That is common sense. All that the man or woman living in a terraced house in Ramsgate cares about is how much they are going to have to pay—what their bill will be. Some of my hon. Friends have been getting a little too ideological recently. Provided that the answer to the question, "Is the price right?" is right, some of the arcane arguments about standard spending assessments and property evaluations seem somewhat academic. I have confidence that my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench will get right that vital question of getting the price right.

Conservative Members cannot help it if, when the Opposition are given an opportunity to choose their weapons, they pick boomerangs. I predict that this debate will boomerang back on the Labour party. I suspect that one passage in the speech by the Leader of the Opposition will come back to haunt him and that is that fascinating snippet—I cannot wait to read it in *Hansard*—when he said that the voters will have to pay "nothing". I cannot wait for the small print of that to be sent round to every constituent in Britain.

After the Government have gone through this consultation exercise—an admittedly difficult period—and have not been able to answer every question about details of the proposals during that time, and after they have published specific proposals and figures for the new local tax, the searchlight of democracy will turn on to the Opposition. People will ask where the Labour party's proposals and precise figures are. If the Labour party's answers are as vague, unconvincing and evasive as they have been this afternoon, the Opposition will pay a heavy price in the vote that really matters—not this pillow fight vote tonight, although that will be won decisively, but the vote of the electorate on polling day.

When the electorate get round to deciding who will govern Britain for the next five years, I do not think that they will make that choice on the basis of a single issue —the poll tax. We were forced to debate on that narrow, artificial ground by the terms of the motion, but whatever happens in the hothouse atmosphere of Westminster, with cleverly crafted motions, the leadership of a great nation will not change hands at a general election on the basis of quibbles and squabbles over local municipal finance. A rather unsuccessful Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, was once cruelly described by Winston Churchill:

"The trouble with Neville is that he always looked at politics through the wrong end of a municipal drainpipe."

Too many Opposition Members have been looking at politics through the wrong end of a municipal drainpipe and concentrating exclusively on the poll tax. When we come to an election, we will raise our sights—the electorate will raise them—and we shall remember other issues that we have not been able to debate today, such as the confident and experienced performances of the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Operation Desert Storm, which was the most successful military action since world war two.

Especially when it comes to paying for local government, the electorate will remember how Britain became a high-growth, low-inflation country during eight of the 11 years of Conservative Government, conditions of prosperity which will apply again to the British economy in 1992, as a result of the wise Budget introduced last week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Above all, I believe that, especially after today's debating triumph, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be seen as the leader with the vision, character and political views who is right to lead Britain into the 21st century.

8.3 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It is absolutely right that this no confidence motion should be precisely focused on the poll tax, because that was proclaimed as the flagship of the Tory party and it epitomises Conservative manifesto commitments, policy and approach during their present term of office, which is coming to a close.

It is appropriate that this is a motion of no confidence because I submit that the Government have lost the trust of the people of Britain. People have no faith in this Administration. The fiscal fiasco that Britain now faces, which stretches from national through to local government, is entirely due to Government attempts to introduce the poll tax and then to step back from it. They have shattered any image of competence and any idea that they are holding the country together, that they are holding their party together and, more importantly, that they are capable of addressing issues such as the increasing division between the wealthy and the poor.

I said "image of competence" rather than competence because it seems to me that it does not really matter to Conservative Members if people misunderstand, if matters are deliberately misread or if people are misled when it comes to the poll tax. The truth has been sacrificed to presentation. Surviving in the short term—the politics of the next television news bulletin—is all that matters to the Government.

Even in economic matters, the Government are prepared to devour the economic seed corn of the future and to sacrifice the future for present political survival. Survival is all.

I submit that that image of confidence is now irrevocably shattered, especially when the Chancellor of the Exchequer goes on one television channel announcing that everyone must pay the poll tax and that the principle is still intact, while the Secretary of State for the Environment is conceding on another channel that most people should make a contribution and that not everyone will have to pay as was originally intended.

It is no good Conservative Members using language such as the "enhanced rebate system". When the Government moved from rates to poll tax, they reduced the rebate system, ensuring that every person in Britain had to pay that 20 per cent. without any rebate. That is the core of the injustice of the poll tax—it is not related to the ability to pay.

The Government should not pretend that every person paying the poll tax will get £140 back as a result of the measure introduced last night, because millions of people will be disappointed. I am prepared for the fact that many pensioners and people on low incomes will turn up at our surgeries, working out the amounts on small pieces of paper and asking what has gone wrong because the Government again promised them a rebate but it has not been delivered.

People are now seeing through the image of competence. I asked my local authority to check the figures for Leeds. Before last week's statement, a gross poll tax would have been set at £409. Transitional relief might have been £56 and estimated benefits £64. Therefore, the amount payable was £289. However, if we consider the figures—such as they were—that were given to us in the statement yesterday, can we assume that the gross poll tax will be down by £140 to £269? Transitional relief will be £18 and the estimated benefit will be £45. Therefore, the amount payable will be £206. In my estimation, that is a reduction of only £83. People will not get £140 back and Conservative Members should not play headline politics by suggesting that they will.

The only people who will benefit by the full £140 reduction will be those who did not qualify for any transitional relief, for the community charge reduction scheme or for housing benefit. In other words, the better-off will gain from the £140, which does nothing to tackle the monstrous injustice of the poll tax which ensures that the poor pay disproportionately. People who are worse off and have to pay 20 per cent. of the bill will benefit by only 20 per cent. of £140, which is £28. That is the reality.

Perhaps a local economic miracle is happening in Wandsworth, because their services can now be provided free, but I suggest that that will prove to be a mirage, too, as that coucil continues its policy of shutting welfare advice centres and is unable to give back-up to people who need to claim their rights.

In the time that I have left, I wish to refer to a matter which is at the root of local government. Tackling poverty was the issue at the heart of the debate when local government was set up. Some years ago, under the chairmanship of Mr. David Widdicombe, the Government commissioned a full inquiry, entitled "The Conduct of Local Authority Business."

The section entitled "The Value of Local Government" contains subsections dealing with pluralism, participation and responsiveness. Under the heading "Pluralism", we read:

"The case for pluralism is that power should not be concentrated in one organ of state but should be dispersed, thereby providing political checks and balances, and a restraint on arbitrary government and absolutism. This is not an argument for fragmentation of the state, nor for divided sovereignty, but rather for increasing the cohesiveness and stability of the state by making it less brittle and allowing within it some safety valve for the expression of contrary views."

The report goes on to suggest that in the 19th century —when modern local government was introduced, along with the local popular franchise, and Lord Salisbury's 1886-92 Administration set up the county councils—the two phenomena were intrinsically linked. It states:

"Salisbury's proposals for local government were based on a fear not of centralising monarchs but of the centralising tendencies of a popular franchise. In his view, the enfranchisement of the working class would make welfare politics the central electoral issue, and lead inexorably to the rise of a powerful administrative state. This could be avoided only by the creation of new local authorities whose value as counterweights would be realised 'by diminishing the excessive and exaggerated powers' of central government."

That is precisely where we are now. When local government was first established, the aim was to take the poor out of the central Government budget, because the pressure of poverty in the growing towns was focusing attention on that budget and decisions were being pushed back from London to local areas. Now the poor are having to pay the price of the poll tax because of the Government's refusal to take account of ability to pay.

The Prime Minister's problem is that he is forced to choose, but each time he makes a decision he divides his own party, fragmenting it into conflicting factions. The new measures to deal with the poll tax will not buy votes for the Conservative party, although they may buy off Tory Back Benchers when it comes to dealing with background cabals. The Government's problem is that the

pocket-lining approach so dear to the hearts of Conservative Members is not the sole interest of the people. They are not interested only in the price tag; nor are they as stupid, as mathematically illiterate or as uninterested as some Conservative Members seem to assume. They do not care only about one-off rebates or transitional reliefs. They want good government—government in which they can believe and which they can trust. They do not want a Government who chop and change with such fervour and violence.

Like all the Government's previous rebates, the poll tax rebate will prove a short-changing sleight of hand. It is the most unjust tax that has ever been introduced in the House of Commons. Not only does it epitomise the present Government's style; it now demonstrates that they have lost the confidence of the people.

The Prime Minister cannot tell the people to wait and see for ever. A deadline is approaching—the last possible date for the general election. Opposition Members are confident that the people will give their vote of no confidence to the Conservatives in that general election, and will return a Labour Government as soon as they have the opportunity to do so.

8.13 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on this rather curious motion, and on the extraordinary speech with which the Leader of the Opposition launched it on its way.

I find the motion curious because it links the House's confidence in Her Majesty's Government to a single issue. As a junior Member, I am reassured to note that others who have been here several decades longer also consider that strange. The Government are responsible for a wide range of matters, and the House's confidence in any Government depends on that Government's ability to deal with them. In a general election, the electorate will judge a Government on that basis. The Opposition, however, have ordained that the House's confidence should rest on a single policy.

One would imagine that, if the Opposition consider that policy to be of such overriding importance—an importance that dwarfs that of all other policies—they would at least be able to present their own carefully documented and detailed alternative. The extraordinary feature of the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, however, was that, although he spoke for more than half an hour, the time that he devoted to presenting an alternative to the House and the country could be counted in seconds.

No one listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech would think that his was the party that had twisted and turned, ducked and weaved, backtracked, deviated, prevaricated and delayed on the issue for several years. No one would think that his was the party that at one point had one policy north of the Scottish border and no policy south of it. Still less would anyone think that it was the party that, after three years of frantic head-scratching and hand-wringing, could only come up with the old discredited system that it had been committed to replacing for a good two years. Even now, the Labour party can hardly claim to be the proud possessor of a clear alternative with numbers attached. If it has such an alternative, which it is waiting to reveal, there was certainly no sign today that the Leader of the Opposition was privy to the details.

Given the strident language of the right hon. Gentleman's attack on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, no one would imagine that the public had so little confidence in the former compared with their confidence in the latter. That comparison is apparent to anyone who studies an opinion poll, reads the mail in his postbag or simply walks down the street and talks to half a dozen people. My right hon. Friend has that support because of the impressive way in which he has dealt with such a wide range of matters during his first 110 days in office.

There are many reasons for having confidence in Her Majesty's Government that the Opposition do not want us to discuss tonight. There is, for example, our confidence that the nation's defences will be secure rather than neglected; that the incentive to work will be maintained rather than stamped on; that choice in education will be enhanced rather than removed; and that unions will be kept within the law rather than released from some of its restraints. All those are reasons for expressing confidence in the Government rather than in the alternative presented by the Opposition. The Opposition, however, have chosen—perhaps wisely—to attempt not to discuss them today.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): They are frit.

Mr. Hague: They are frit, as my hon. Friend so eloquently says.

Nevertheless, it can also be risky for the Opposition to concentrate on the issue of local government finance. The right to be so critical of the change in Government policy would normally be associated with the responsibility to present a detailed policy of one's own.

The Opposition have criticised the Government for taking time to reach their final conclusions. Which policy will be finished first, the Government's or the Opposition's? Which will be presented in the most detail in the next few months? When the Secretary of State for the Environment has completed his consultations about the new local charge, or tax, and published the details of his proposals, will the Opposition undertake to publish theirs in the same detail? Will they undertake now to be as specific as my right hon. Friend will be, and as clear about the financial consequences for households in different circumstances? I very much doubt it. But, if they are to be the critics of consultation, the Opposition should have the courage to give such a commitment now.

Mr. John P. Smith: May I take up the hon. Gentleman's reference to consultation? The principles of the so-called alternative tax have already been laid down: it is to be a property tax combined with another poll tax. That resulted from what was presumably a lengthy review. Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Minister to list the individuals and organisations responsible for proposing that hybrid tax during the review period? He will be lucky to name one.

Mr. Hague: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that one of the purposes of the consultation period is to enable a long list of individuals and organisations to give their views, and to assist in the development of our policy. I see no reason for the Opposition to object to that. The country is still in the dark about the details of their

[Mr. Hague]

proposals, and, indeed, about whether they agree or disagree with the proposal to transfer part of local revenue raising to VAT. Judging by all appearances, so are they. They huffed and puffed about it last week, with much noise and indignation, but when it came to the vote on Monday night they abstained—or most did; some voted against.

What did the Opposition do when they voted last night on the £140 reduction in community charge bills? They raised no objection on either Second Reading or Third Reading—again after much huffing and puffing before the vote. At least on that occasion they all managed to do the same, but what clarity of leadership and what remarkable decision-making powers the Opposition displayed. What would the Opposition do if they were in office? Would they maintain the rate of value added tax, or increase local taxes, or increase income tax? The country will want to know before they reach their verdict on the Opposition.

The motion refers to the damage done to the country, but we do not require any lectures from the Opposition about damage to local government. Labour councillors throughout the country have shown a persistent inability to control local authority spending. If the Opposition want to talk about damage, they ought to reflect on what Labour councils, under the rating system, did to former prosperous urban areas, or ponder upon the damage done to the rule of law when one in seven of their elected Members of Parliament decided not to pay a tax that had been approved by the House, a tax that their constituents have had to pay for them.

The Opposition appear to be saying that the time taken for consultations is doing the damage. That is a bit rich from a party that has already spent three years in consultation, albeit only with itself. How much damage, though, would have been caused if at least a few weeks had not been spent upon consultations, and how foolish it would have been not to provide time for local authorities and other bodies to have their say before fixing the final details. One can imagine what the Opposition would have said. They would have used words such as "hasty", "dictatorial" and "inadequate consultation". The Government ought to finalise these matters according to their own timetable, not according to a timetable wished upon them by Opposition spokesmen who would oppose the result whatever it might be.

Some good has come out of the community charge experience, if we can call it that. It would be wise of the Opposition to recognise that fact. First, the public have understood for the first time the extent of the cost of local government and the importance of efficiency in providing its services. Secondly, the wide disparity in the efficiency with which councils run their services has been revealed. Thirdly, the difficulty of improving accountability while retaining the existing local government structure has been demonstrated. The review of the local government structure that is now under way provides us with a great opportunity to improve the effectiveness and comprehensibility of local government and to make its scale in each area more appropriate to the needs and wishes of local people. The scope for debate and ideas that the review creates ought to be welcomed by the Opposition, not attacked as indecision.

We know why the Opposition tabled the motion. They are worried that the new system will prove acceptable and will be seen as a perfectly proper way to raise money. They are horrified by the popularity that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's performance during the past few months has attracted. They are dismayed by the stream of sensible decisions that have emerged from No. 10 Downing street during that time. A year ago, the Opposition were 28 points ahead in the opinion polls. Today they are level pegging with the Conservative party. The awful news for them is that, if they were to lose one quarter of the ground over the next year that they have lost during the last year, their future would be very bleak. So it should be after their performance today. The House ought to reject their motion.

8.23 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Unlike the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), who is just about to leave the Chamber, I am not used to pillow fights before the hols. I do not really understand them. I do not believe this debate to be a pillow fight before the hols. I believe that it is a very important debate. I have sat through most of it. Almost without exception, Conservative Members have defended what has been done on two counts. Their argument is that the poll tax was not a sufficiently important issue for the Opposition to move a motion of no confidence in the Government. Secondly, they seem to want to get the boot into Blaby. That is what most Conservative Members have done in this debate.

The poll tax has created great hardship for people. It was one of the worst measures that ever passed into law. Can any Conservative Member still say that he supports the poll tax? A few of them, such as the right hon. Members for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) will stick to their guns, but few Conservative Members now have a kind word to say about the poll tax. It is not all that long ago that they appeared unanimously to agree that it was excellent. A few of them kicked up a bit of a fuss, but the vast majority of Conservative Members went through the Lobby only a few months ago to pass the measure. That legislation led finally to a crisis within the Conservative party and to the overthrow of the former Prime Minister. The person who first opposed the Prime Minister, the present Secretary of State for the Environment, used the poll tax as one of the main planks in his campaign.

The Government are trying to make us believe that the poll tax is to be abolished, but they know in their hearts that it will not be abolished. It created, and it will continue to create during the next two years, great hardship for the British people. The Government will eventually pay the penalty for this stupid legislation. The £140 reduction in the poll tax is acceptable to all concerned, but it is a panic measure. What will it achieve? Will it assist local authorities such as mine in West Yorkshire? Will it assist the police and fire services in West Yorkshire? Recently, the police service had to fix its budget in accordance with the standard spending assessment guidelines. The result is that the chief constable of the West Yorkshire police has had to admit that, during the next financial year, there will be 500 fewer police officers on the beat. Moreover, last week the authority decided that it could not fill the vacant post of assistant chief constable, yet that police authority saw a 27 per cent. increase in crime last year.

It does not stop at that. The same can be said of the fire authority. Up to 150 jobs and nine special appliances that

are needed for emergencies on motorways and chemical works and coal mine explosions had to be withdrawn from service because of the fear of poll tax capping. What will the £140 poll tax reduction do to solve that problem? The House knows full well that it will do nothing to solve it.

We hope that the Government's review of local government finance will not take too long, because the electorate wants to know the results before the election. Whether it is in June, September, October or in 1992, it is not far away. Last Thursday, in his statement, the Secretary of State talked about councils being irresponsible and not being up to the job. He said that the Government would have to consider policies to alter the administration of local government.

Is it Government policy in the review to put education, police and fire services under central Government financing and then under central Government control? If so, who will be responsible for running the services? Will they be run by elected bodies or by bodies selected by the Secretary of State, similar to the water authorities and health authorities? What will happen to the authorities? Will county councils be abolished and will we be left with district councils? If so, and if the fire and police services are taken away, what duties will they be left with?

Will the main local government services be controlled centrally by selected bodies, and will district councils be left with the old parish council status? If that is the case, it will mean the complete destruction not just of local government but of local democracy. If the Government go down that path, they will pay a heavy price because it will not work. Like all other sections of the community, local government is not perfect and never will be—just like the House. We must never desert the position where local government is run democratically by locally elected councillors. That is the danger of the so-called review.

The hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) talked about the new system. I do not know whether he is privy to more knowledge than we are. Does anyone, including the Government, know what is planned? I do not believe that they do. I do not think that the Government know how to go about it.

We will end up with a so-called property tax and a head tax. Again, it is a panic measure. Because of that, we are to have an increase in VAT of 2·5 per cent. Everybody, rich and poor, will have to pay that increase. That is being introduced to get the Government off the hook because of the poll tax action which they took, for political dogma. The vast majority of Conservative Members followed their leader although many of them knew well that the poll tax was wrong.

Government policy on local government should be put in place so that the public know about it long before the general election. If that does not happen, it amounts to deceiving the people. By whatever means the Government try to cover the mess that they have created, they will not deceive the people. The day hon. Members voted in favour of the legislation to introduce the poll tax, they were all guilty. The motion is about only one of the no-confidence issues which warrant debate. There will be many others.

8.34 pm

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): The motion alleges no confidence in the Government's ability to rectify the damage done by the poll tax, yet the actions of the Prime Minister in the four months that he has been in office have instilled confidence in the people. Every poll taken over the past four months has amply shown that confidence in the Prime Minister is growing all the time. That is the key fact.

Mr. Lewis: What about Ribble Valley?

Mr. Morris: The Ribble Valley poll was not on confidence in the Prime Minister.

The confidence of the people arises because of the Prime Minister's ability to take difficult decisions. His first difficult decision, now coming to fruition, was to join the European exchange rate mechanism. We see the result, with sterling today above its norm. His second decision was to build a better relationship with Europe; that, too, has increased confidence in him.

At 1 o'clock today, I stood on the steps of All Saints in Northampton, having had the privilege of taking part in a service of thanksgiving for the cessation of the war in the Gulf. As I stood with the mayor, the councillors, the bishops and the families from Simpson barracks, all of them to a person were talking about the Prime Minister's handling of the Gulf crisis and their confidence in his leadership. I am afraid that the Leader of the Opposition, although he was generous with his support in the House, was not mentioned.

The discussion went on to the community charge, because local councillors were there. What did they say?

Mr. Lewis: Did they call it the community charge?

Mr. Morris: They talked about the community charge and the review of the community charge. Then they remembered that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had much experience in local government, being the first Prime Minister for a long time who had been a councillor. Those of us who were in local government at the same time remember that he played a particular role on Lambeth council. In those days, councillors from other London boroughs went to Lambeth to see the pioneering work that it was doing. They went there to see the housing advisory service set up on the initiative of my right hon. Friend —a pioneering service that was a model for the rest of the country. What would happen if other councillors went to Lambeth today? It is the pits. Right hon. and hon. Opposition Members know that its record is one of the worst in the country and that it is run by the Labour party.

One of the earliest decisions by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was to take the homeless off the streets of London. He asked my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to ensure that hostel accommodation was available for them.

One problem for Labour Members today is that they face a Prime Minister who understands local government and who understands what is practical, realistic and possible. He is a realist. One of the greatest changes that hon. Members have seen in the Chamber has been Prime Minister's Question Time. Hon. Members now get a direct answer, which they never got from any former Prime Minister, regardless of party, since I have been in the House. There are not many hon. Members on the Opposition Benches who have had experience of a Labour Government. The former Prime Minister, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, never answered a question: he never dealt with more than two or three questions at any Prime Minister's

[Mr. Morris]

Question Time. Opposition Members should remember that. But my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister does answer questions and face up to difficulties.

Of course, that embarrasses the Opposition. They do not like someone who recognises when something is wrong and who is prepared to face up to change. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right to recognise that the community charge has not worked. That is why the community charge is now dead. There is no debate about that. The community charge is dead; it is finished. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has put forward a framework for the future of local government finance—a household tax.

Mr. Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: No. The hon. Gentleman is happy to comment from a sedentary position, so I am not giving way to him. He is a newcomer to the House.

The framework that the Prime Minister has proposed is a good one. It is based on a household tax and it has two elements. The Labour party's proposals as I understand them have three elements, so there cannot be much wrong with something that has two elements.

The Prime Minister has recognised that any local government tax has to be at a lower level. That is why he is right to reduce its absolute level. It was a good move to ensure that that reduction was by way of a sales tax, an increase in VAT which, incidentally, brings us into line with the standard rate for the rest of Europe so it has a double benefit. One could argue that any future Government would have to bring us into line with the standard rate in Europe, and my right hon. Friend has done that in regard to local government, a key part of government in this country.

That is what really needles the Opposition. At last they realise that the Prime Minister believes in local government, understands it and will make it work. That worries them stiff. They know that almost all the local authorities that offer the worst services are Labour councils. Which local authorities are criticised by the Audit Commission? They are almost all Labour local authorities. Which local authorities have the most abuses in terms of direct labour? They are all Labour local authorities.

It does not matter which aspect of local government one considers—the areas of failure are all Labour-controlled areas. Year after year, they are being found out. The Prime Minister has rumbled them and the structure he now proposes is right. If there is to be consultation, who are we to complain? Consultation is a good thing and it takes time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Consult the electorate."] We shall consult the electorate. I support wholeheartedly what my right hon. Friend is doing. I remember that under the last Labour Government there was not much consultation about the selective employment tax, and what a failure that was.

At last we have a Prime Minister who is prepared to recognise that a tax has not worked and that a new structure and a new tax is needed and he is putting forward proposals for discussion within a broad framework. I wish him well in that, and the exercise has my total confidence.

8.43 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I report to the House that nowhere in the London borough of Newham is there any confidence in this Conservative Government. There is virulent opposition and hostility, in particular because of the poll tax debacle, which is surely the biggest fiasco in modern political history. It is a U-turn of quite staggering proportions. The once-proclaimed proud flagship is not only dead in the water but is visibly sinking beneath the waves before their very eyes. But I have yet to hear a single word of apology from Conservative Members. There has not been a word of apology or contrition from the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris), or even from the Government. Any Government with an ounce of decency or shame would resign, and that is what we want them to do. They are talking about consultation and we want them to consult the British people through the ballot box.

Since last April, the Government have spent £3·7 billion to ameliorate the poll tax. Yesterday, they voted a further £4·3 billion. I hope that we do not hear any more from the Government about throwing money at problems. The poll tax was not only a unmitigated disaster but a costly one.

It was obvious to all sensible and rational people that the poll tax would be a disaster. If they had listened to the Labour party the Conservatives would never have made that mistake. The hon. Member for Northampton, South tells us that the present Prime Minister understand local government. If the Prime Minister understands local government, why did he support the poll tax? He was one of its main architects. After all that, the Government have the gall to expect the country to let them continue running our affairs after such a spectacular display of incompetence.

Many local authorities, including my own, have had to take on a huge number of costly staff and have had to buy in an awful lot of expensive computer equipment to implement the poll tax. What will happen to those staff and that expenditure? Local councils have been thrown into turmoil. In Newham the day before the U-turn was announced, the staff worked a 24-hour shift to get the poll tax bills ready. All that work has gone to waste, all that paper is now being shredded and, as I understand it, no bills are likely to go out before June. So how on earth do the Government expect the tax to be collected? They are sabotaging the collection of the tax.

We should understand that the poll tax was not an aberration or an accident. It was not introduced by mistake. The poll tax is the epitome of Conservatism. It is the essence of Toryism. It tells us all we need to know about the Tory party. It represents their political values. It shows in stark clarity their contempt for fairness.

The previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) told us about the ideology behind the tax—that a duke should pay the same as a dustman. That is the essence of the Tory party and its political values. After all, the poll tax was merely the last of a long series of measures that have passed the burden of taxation from those at the top to those at the bottom. For the past 12 years, the Conservative party has been making the rich richer and the poor poorer. It is not as though the poll tax was different; it was the essence of Conservatism. It was blatantly biased and it offended the British people's

concept of fairness and that is why it failed. The British people would not accept something which was blatantly unfair. But there is more to it.

The poll tax has a political aim and object. It was a conspiracy to drown Labour local government in a wave of unpopularity. It was contrived that everyone should pay a large bill. It was thought that Labour local authorities would get the blame. The political thinking behind it was that when everyone was given a large bill the anger of the people and the blame would be directed at the Labour town halls. That backfired. The British people are not so naive as to fall for such a confidence trick. They know where the blame lies. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was swept away, not Labour local councils. Where is the right hon. Member for Finchley? Why has she not been here? I know that she has been voted a great deal of extra money today. Perhaps she is arranging her bank account or setting up a research department in which to put all her poll tax papers.

What about the accomplices on the Conservative Benches? My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition gave details of all the speeches they made and how they were all in favour of the poll tax. We knew they were. Now they are panicking. The measure announced yesterday was conceived out of panic and opportunism. The rats are deserting the sinking flagship and everyone will have to pay a surcharge when they go shopping in order to get the Conservative party out of a hole.

This is part of a wider collapse of Tory policy. The reason for the suffering and turmoil in local government over the past 12 years has been the way in which the Government have shifted the burden of taxation from the taxpayer to the ratepayer—from central taxation and central Government to local government. In 1979, 61 per cent. of local government expenditure came from rate support grant. That has now been reduced to 42 per cent. That is the simple reason why there were increases in the rates and cuts in services.

The object and political thinking behind that is that the Conservative Government were supposed to get the credit for the tax cuts and the Labour local councils were to be blamed for the increases in rates and poll tax and simultaneous cuts in services. That is what the Government thought would happen. All that has failed. The British people have seen through all that and the game is up. Therefore, the policy has had to be reversed. We now have the big shift of billions of pounds away from local government to central Government finance.

The Government have had their come-uppance and surely they will get it again at the general election, which we want as soon as possible.

8.52 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): During the debate, criticisms have been expressed about the way in which Her Majesty's Government have conducted themselves over the review of local government. It is a comprehensive review in that it relates to structure and functions as well as finance. I am a little surprised by the terms of reference of the motion of no confidence. It is far too restrictive and, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out, local government is a matter on which the Government have been active since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took office in November.

From listening to the Leader of the Opposition, it would seem that one of his principal criticisms of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is his alleged dithering, particularly in respect of the financing of local government. Opposition Members should not confuse dithering with analysis and consultation. Before making such accusations, Opposition Members should remind themselves of the sequence of events since November.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took over at a time of rising tension in the Gulf region. During the intervening period, United Kingdom armed forces have been involved in a war. There is universal agreement and admiration for the manner in which all those involved, whether militarily or as international leaders, conducted themselves. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's actions were hardly those of a man acting in a dilatory manner.

Parallel to that, my right hon. Friend has had to repair fences with our European Community partners. He made it clear from the outset that he wished the United Kingdom to be at the centre of the decision-making process, influencing events rather than constantly complaining on the touchline. The manner in which he immediately sought to establish a close working relationship with the German Chancellor was not only highly commendable but hardly the approach of a dithering man.

As I interpret the political scene, the Government, and particularly my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, are now giving their maximum attention to domestic matters, and that includes the economy and the review of local government. As the House will know, I represent a low-income area. Average earnings are about 14 per cent. below the national average. The introduction of the community charge to replace the former domestic rating system undoubtedly created difficulties for family budgets. In my area in 1989-90, the last year of the old domestic rating system, the average rates paid on a typical semi-detached house or bungalow were £380. The following year, with the introduction of the community charge, a couple living in the same property had to find £650 out of their net disposable income. Even allowing for the increase that would have taken place in their rates bill, the change to the community charge meant an additional financial burden of between £4 and £5 per week for a couple living in that typical dwelling in my constituency.

Clearly, that was unacceptable and something needed to be done. Whatever conclusions are to be drawn, they have to be right. We could not, and the nation cannot, afford any more costly errors.

I see nothing wrong with a Government admitting that a mistake has been made. After all, in other walks of life and other organisations and companies, we individuals frequently change our minds. Furthermore—it is worth reminding the House of this—had there been any obvious alternative to the domestic rates that commanded universal support, it would have been implemented many years ago. It is worth mentioning that the Labour party reached its conclusions only relatively recently. It was pointed out earlier today that the Liberal Democrats now favour a local income tax. When I became a Member of this House more than 20 years ago, they were always advocating a system of site value rating. They too have changed their minds, and I have no quibble about that.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced a number of interim conclusions about the basis of the proposed local tax.

[Mr. Robert Hicks]

Broadly, I agree with those conclusions. Clearly this must be the starting point. We all await with interest the consultation document to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred today. In respect of the functions and structure of local government, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment last week laid down parameters of his findings, so we shall be able to proceed with more detailed consultations. Last week, too, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a major transfer of financial resources, so that the financial burdens placed on charge payers will be at more acceptable levels in the future.

This is a sensible and mature approach to the solution of what, after all, is a very complex problem, for which there is no obvious and universally acceptable solution. Most people would welcome the opportunity to be involved in this consultation process, in the knowledge that they were now genuinely being listened to. I sincerely hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will continue in this vein and will retain his style of leadership. I am certain that the country as a whole will appreciate his approach, and I hope that all my hon. and right hon. Friends will do likewise.

9 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Prime Minister—wherever he is—may well be pleased to know that, within five minutes of his sitting down this afternoon, one of my constituents, previously unknown to me, telephoned my office. Having watched the Prime Minister on television, my constituent asked two simple questions: "Does he know that the poll tax is a desperately serious issue? Does he understand how much suffering the poll tax has caused families like mine?" Thousands of families, hounded by the poll tax, must have watched the Prime Minister this afternoon with a mixture of bewilderment and contempt as he desperately struggled to avoid talking about the Government's record and their proposals.

The Prime Minister gave us three platitudes that he called general principles. He then promised that the new system would be fairer than the old rates. The Prime Minister has made similar promises in the past. Indeed, on 26 April last year, in a letter to one of his constituents, he promised a new system, saying categorically:

"The poll tax"—

poll tax—

"is a very much fairer and more acceptable system of paying towards the cost of local government."

The Prime Minister says whatever seems convenient at the time.

Of course, much of the Prime Minister's speech today was devoted to an attack on Labour councils. I have no doubt at all that the Secretary of State for the Environment, true to form, will do exactly the same when he addresses the House tonight. I hope that he will not be foolish enough to describe Labour councils and Labour councillors as the Prime Minister did—as unpopular, and growing increasingly unpopular. When the Tory Government came to power, there were 7,300 Labour councillors in England and Wales; now there are more than 9,000. By the most obvious test of political popularity —electoral success—Labour councils have grown steadily more popular with the years of Labour government. By pretending otherwise, the Prime Minister simply makes himself ridiculous.

However, I offer a word of consolation to the Prime Minister, who, in defiance of the usual courtesies, is not with us. My word of consolation is that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) supports him. So far as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup is concerned, the present Prime Minister has one overwhelming advantage: he is not the previous Prime Minister.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Selly Oak): I have high regard for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as a Birmingham Member of Parliament. Last night's *Birmingham Evening Mail* reported the results of a poll for which the Labour-controlled city council had asked. According to that poll, three quarters of the population think that the Labour-controlled council wastes money. Does that show that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was wrong in criticising Labour councils?

Mr. Hattersley: The test that I asked the still-absent Prime Minister to apply was that of electoral success. We shall wait until May to see which party is in control of the council in Birmingham. The hon. Gentleman knows very well which party has been in control there for the past four years, and I believe that it will continue in control for the foreseeable future.

I turn away from the Prime Minister briefly and come to the poll tax, which was the product of political prejudice. In the graphic phrase of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the calculated intention was to make "dukes and dustmen" contribute the same amount towards the cost of local services. It was intended to emasculate autonomous local government and to make local government the creature of Westminster and Whitehall. It was meant to reduce the level and the quality of local services—and the dogma remains.

As we have heard time after time today from Conservative Back Benchers, the poll tax has not lost its charm for the Conservative party. It has not lost its ideological appeal. There has been no gradual intellectual conversion——

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): It had no charm.

Mr. Hattersley: On this occasion, as on many others, the hon. Gentleman will speak for himself, but he will recall some of the speeches made in the past—if he does not, I promise to recall them for him—which took a rather different view from that which I freely admit has always been his.

There has been no gradual intellectual conversion or sudden spiritual revelation. There has just been the sickening feeling that if the Government follow their honest beliefs, they will lose the general election. If they could get away with it again, they would. I have no doubt about that.

I watched the Secretary of State for the Environment being interviewed on Sunday afternoon—wriggling and turning, twisting and weaving, and saying anything and everything rather than express a word of regret that the poll tax had been introduced in the first place. Last Friday,

in his stuttering speech in Southport, he said nothing about the burden on low-income families; nothing about the damaging effect on local services; nothing about the inefficient way in which the poll tax was collected, and nothing about the fact that it took less from the rich and more from the poor. There was no remorse.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) rightly said, the Government will not and they do not, for they cannot, admit the basic intrinsic unfairness of the poll tax. Indeed, on television, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) could bring himself to say only that the poll tax had to go because it was "seen" as unfair by many poll tax payers, as if the play was a great success, but the audience was a total disaster.

There is absolutely no feeling of guilt about the poll tax on the Tory Benches. There is no embarrassment about the money wasted on its collection and no shame at the extravagant claims that were once made about its advantages. In the Tory party, the poll tax produces only one emotion—fear, the fear of defeat. Anyone who doubted that that Tory fear is escalating into Conservative panic must have had those doubts dispelled by listening to the radio yesterday morning. The hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) is back on the "Today" programme —a sure sign that there is trouble in the ranks. There he was—the Corporal Jones of the 1922 Committee—urging his colleagues not to panic. But it is too late—poll tax panic is now endemic in the Tory party. To be fair, as is always my habit, that is only reasonable, because the introduction of the poll tax, together with the incompetence of its administration and the chaos that now surrounds its retreat, is enough in itself to lose the Government the next general election.

Unfortunately for the country, the fear that has gripped the Tory party has rendered it incapable of taking decisive action or even coming to any agreed public position. On some days, a Minister argues that the poll tax has been killed off, but on others we are told that it is not dead, but sleeping. Last Sunday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was categorical in his assertion that the essential characteristic of the poll tax—the obligation of every adult citizen to pay the tax—would be preserved.

There is also the open and well-documented dispute between Ministers about whether a poll tax register has been maintained. The Secretary of State for the Environment has added to the confusion. When told that he had said,

"We shall not need a register",

he replied with all the dynamic certainty that once made him a candidate for the Tory party leadership,

"We haven't said that. We have said that we might."

In fact, the Government are in such a position that the rats cannot even agree among themselves about the best way of leaving the sinking ship.

The dithering and the doubts begin at the top. On this issue in particular, the Prime Minister is incapable of providing incisive leadership. He has claimed that he was "bounced".

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The Prime Minister is here, but no one has seen him.

Mr. Hattersley: My right hon. Friend suggests that the Prime Minister is here, but no one has noticed him. The right hon. Gentleman has claimed that he was "bounced" —his word—into acceptance of the poll tax. He seems to think that the confession that he was "bounced" is an excuse. In truth, anyone who is bounced into so catastrophic a decision is not fit to be Prime Minister. Throughout the poll tax debate, the right hon. Gentleman has bounced and bent in a way that must have reminded him of one of the circus figures of his youth—the incredible indiarubber man. In 1989, he told the *Sunday Mirror*,

"I have been in the Cabinet for just two years. I haven't run my own department. Nobody knows how I would react if something went horribly wrong."

Thanks to the poll tax, we know now—he dithers.

I do not accuse the Prime Minister of lacking principle——

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): This is very cheap.

Mr. Hattersley: I repeat, I do not accuse the Prime Minister of lacking principle; I simply assert that he lacks ideas of his own. No Prime Minister since the war has come to that high office with so few firm convictions and so few strong opinions, and it shows.

Last July, the Prime Minister warned the Conservatives of Wales—a small gathering of men and women—of the horrors that awaited them if a Labour Government were elected. "They intend to freeze the married couples allowance," he warned—the Government did that last week. "They plan to meddle with mortgage interest relief," he warned—the Government did that last week. He went on to give another warning certain to make all Welsh flesh creep. He said, "They intend to introduce a new local government tax, but they will not tell us what it is."

When yesterday, in a fit of pique, the Prime Minister attacked the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) for failing to change the poll tax and mortgage tax relief, honesty should have compelled him to admit that, although the right hon. Member for Blaby was not making those changes, the Prime Minister was publicly attacking the idea that such changes might be made.

The unfortunate right hon. Member for Blaby was the subject of most of the speech of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who attacked his former colleague almost from start to finish. It would have been extraordinary, had we not experienced their work together, to recall that they once sat in the same Cabinet. It reminds me of an old adage that will be repeated time after time after time between now and general election day, "If they cannot agree among themselves, how can they hope to run the country?"

The game of quoting what Tory Ministers have said about the poll tax and the iniquities of property tax, not to mention the catastrophe of property tax and poll tax combined, is so easy that it is barely worth playing. There are two members of the Cabinet, however, who deserve special mention.

I absolve from all blame the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities who, being a junior Minister, has all those problems associated with that rank. He will rightly say, for I have experienced similar difficulties, that he was acting under orders. We cannot say the same about the Secretary of State for Wales, who continually makes himself ridiculous over this issue. A year ago, he said that a property tax was

"A tax on house improvements, a tax on the improvement of the neighbourhood . . . a tax on people trying to better themselves."

The Secretary of State for Wales will vote for such a tax tonight.

[Mr. Hattersley]

The Home Secretary, as one would expect, said what was fashionable at the time. He is therefore firmly on record against a tax that is based on property values. Last February he, too, criticised the principle of property taxes. He warned:

"If you increase the value of your home, it will be hit by the new tax. If you save and invest in your home for your family and your children, it will be taxed."

The Home Secretary will vote for a property tax tonight. Last year's convictions will not prevent him from giving wholehearted support to this year's policies. The Home Secretary is always the first boy to leave the burning deck. But the Prime Minister should do better.

One of the Prime Minister's problems is his habit of saying the first thing that comes into his head on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Early last week, he was categorical in his promise that all questions about the future of local government finance would be answered on Thursday.

It is now clear that the Secretary of State for the Environment, far from giving all the answers, had not even asked himself all the questions. Changes were made to his scheme, even to the interim scheme, during the days that followed.

The hapless Minister was sent on the television to explain that, since the councils had "stopped their computers"—a charmingly archaic way in which to describe these things—there no great inconvenience would be caused by the Government changing their mind once or twice more. Local authority accountants, on the other hand, took a different view. They described themselves on the same programme as "suicidal".

The latest adjustment raises the essential question about the number of beneficiaries we can expect from the new scheme—the one-off Conservative rescue provision for 1991-1992, which the Secretary of State concedes cannot be reproduced next year.

My first question to the Secretary of State is how many poll tax payers will have their bills reduced by £140 as a result of last week's announcement? The first impression —it was certainly the Government's fraudulent intention —was that every poll tax payer would benefit by £140. That is clearly not so. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State is perfectly entitled to make his calculations. The computers have stopped, so he can make whatever changes he chooses.

I ask the Secretary of State again how many beneficiaries will receive the maximum poll tax reduction. That was the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East earlier this afternoon. Figures have been touted about, insinuated in headlines and repeated time after time in speeches this afternoon. How many will benefit?

I make a confession to the Secretary of State. I shall be one of them. My polls tax bill for two of us was £300, compared to rates of rather more than £1,000. It is now to be reduced to a joint poll tax bill of barely £70. I regard that as wholly indefensible. I believe that millions of people in Britain who are better off under the poll tax and will benefit from what the Secretary of State proposed regard it as a shame of the worst sort that they should benefit when services for poorer people are being cut and the poll tax paid by poorer people is being increased.

I ask the Secretary of State again how many people will receive the full £140. Of course, we know that everyone will pay the extra VAT. We know that people far worse off than I am will contribute to the VAT in order that my poll tax bill can be cut again. But how many people will receive the maximum benefit?

On 23 November, the Prime Minister addressed that very subject on the BBC "Six O'clock News". He said:

"I want to make sure that when we make changes . . . they don't just re-distribute the burden from one pocket to another . . . That is not the way to proceed."

If the Prime Minister had done the House the courtesy of being here this evening, I would have offered him the chance to make clear his real feelings on the subject. Does he still believe that moving the burden from one pocket to another is not the way to proceed? If so, how does he justify the switch from poll tax to VAT? If not, when and why did he change his mind? Neither of those questions is unimportant, for they show that we have a Prime Minister who cannot remain constant to an idea for more than a few weeks at a time.

This afternoon the Prime Minister made no attmept to answer my right hon. Friend's question, so I address mine to the Secretary of State, not least because he and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)— *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition suggets that the Prime Minister should come forth and be recognised. Perhaps he should come forth and see whether he is recognised. He sits below the Chair so I shall continue to address my questions to the Secretary of State. I do so not least because, as the right hon. Member for Chingford announced last night with such malicious glee, the Secretary of State is the man who four months ago said that he had all the answers to the poll tax ready in his pocket.

I hope that, when the Secretary of State has concluded the part of his speech which will be more appropriate to the Oxford union 1950, he will answer four questions. After all, he cannot go on being the juvenile lead for ever.

My four questions are these. First, in the Secretary of State's new hybrid tax, how is the balance to be struck —that is to say, the proportion of payment—between the roof tax and the poll tax? Secondly, what is the balance that he hopes eventually to achieve between local and national finance and council services? Does he regard the balance between national and local finance as about right now, or does he wish to change it? Thirdly, does he intend too maintain a register of poll tax payers, or has he devised some other way of enforcing individual collection? Fourthly, will a tax be levied on every individual adult whatever their circumstances and incomes?

I must warn the Secretary of State now that there is no way that we shall be satisfied simply by the answer that these are proper subjects for consultation. It is almost, but not quite, inconceivable that the Government have not already come to a view on those fundamental matters. If the Secretary of State tells us otherwise, both the House and the country will have to decide whether that answer is pure invention to get him through tonight or a genuine admission that the Government are still lost and bewildered. The Secretary of State must not delude himself into believing that the word "consultation" is a magic charm which prevents him from suffering any harm. Everybody is in favour of genuine consultation. What we are against is bogus consultation, which acts as no more than an excuse for indecision, and that is what we have.

Naturally, the Secretary of State is himself part of the problem. He is the worst possible man to do the job. His forte is the quick headline, like the promise made on 16 November that public anxiety could be dealt with at a stroke by switching education spending to central Government. Whatever happened to that idea? The Secretary of State has another problem. He is regarded by half the Tory party as the assassin, and they will not allow him to deviate too far from the policies of the Prime Minister whose fall he precipitated. He was appointed to his job for what the Prime Minister thought were party political reasons, but these days a Tory Prime Minister cannot even organise a decent conspiracy.

Yesterday evening, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) reminded the House that Benjamin Disraeli described the Tory party as an organised hypocrisy. Under this Prime Minister, it has become an utterly disorganised hypocrisy. It cannot even deceive the public for long. Its shabby manoeuvres are immediately exposed and its willingness to put party before national interest recognised and denounced even by those newspapers that three months ago were its warmest supporters.

The government have no direction and no purpose. They are doomed and acting as if they know that they are doomed. It is the knowledge that a whole decade of Tory government is almost at an end that has made them the most dithering Administration this century. The words of Sir Winston Churchill must now haunt the Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman has decided only to be undecided, resolved only to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, and all-powerful for impotence. It is time for him and for them to go.

9.28 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The whole House will have recognised the style of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), because we read it time and again in *Punch*. He will be as familiar as we are with the circulation problems that have attended his continuous contributions to it.

The House is entitled to ask the right hon. Gentleman a question. We heard his views about our proposals, but it will not have escaped the attention of the House that he did not tell us anything of his views or what he advocates. I dare say that the right hon. Gentleman, with the characteristic gloss that he brings to the detail of policy, will not have read the Labour party's "Fair Rates". If he had, he would know that he was urging the House that we should go back to the rating system.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): What is wrong with fair rates?

Mr. Heseltine: That is a helpful question, and I shall give the House the answer which is, in fact, contained in what the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said. He said:

"I would like to see us getting rid of the rates and putting something else in their place. If we could come out with a practical solution in the next four years . . . nobody would be happier than me."

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned four years, but those words were uttered 12 years ago, and what policy is he advocating tonight—a return to the rates. There is certainly no quick headline in any of that, but there is no substance in the proposals either.

The House was not as full as I should like it to have been when the leader of the Liberal party gave us his views on the debate. I have never listened to a more sanctimonious speech in all the years that I have been here. The case that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) deployed was that the Labour and Conservative parties indulged in beastly party politics, while the Liberal party was above it. In the House, his party is not so much above it as irrelevant to it. For a Liberal leader to claim that his party's behaviour sets it apart from political infighting is one of the most preposterous statements that I have ever heard. Everyone knows that, when it comes to by-elections and local elections, there is no trick that the Liberal Democrats will not pull, no funny statistics that they will not use, no poll that they will not rig, no device that they will not contrive and no sharp practice in which they will not engage. I do not need to consult the Labour party on that—at least we can agree a consensus there.

The debate about local government did not begin in 1979. The real issues that we have to address in the debate began when the Labour party was in power. It began the process of trying to bring local government under some sort of control. It was a Labour Environment Secretary who said that the party was over. It was the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) who introduced to the House, admittedly at the behest of the International Monetary Fund, the biggest planned cut in local authority current expenditure that we have seen.

What is the totality? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked the critical question: how would the Labour party constrain local government any more successfully were it to win a general election, than it succeeded in doing when it was last in power, particularly as it lost power because it ran from its own organised unions, which it could not resist?

Mr. Shore: As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, the phrase, "the party's over" did not come from my lips,but that does not matter. I willingly plead guilty to the charge that we reduced the rate support grant from 66 to 61 per cent. of local government expenditure—the level at which we held it for three years. The first thing that the right hon. Gentleman did when he stepped into the Department of the Environment was to cut it to 59 per cent., from which it has never ceased to be cut, until it reached 38 per cent., as he told me in a written answer today.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman has made my point. In the last three years on average under the Labour Government, the rate support grant went down by 2 per cent. In my first year, it went down by another 2 per cent. That is precisely the point that I was making.

We understand that the Labour party's policy in the first year is to go back to the rates, and that it will then move on to another system of local government finance. In the course of his excellent speech this afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked the simple question, "What will it cost?" The debate has been clearly conducted around the question of whether the Opposition would produce the figures. My right hon. Friend challenged them to put the figures in the Library. Five hours have gone by. We have checked the Library of the House of Commons and the figures are not there. Why are the figures not there? We know that the Opposition have the figures because

[Mr. Heseltine]

when my right hon. Friend asked whether anybody had seen the figures, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) put up his hand. He has seen the figures. He should be so lucky.

So we have another question for the Opposition, and this is all about whether people will play any part in the Opposition's calculations. Would a single person with an income just above the help afforded in Labour's extended rebate system pay the same as a family of wage-earning adults living next door? If so, how conceivably could such a situation be justified? We need an answer, because in 1989 the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was quoted in *Tribune* as saying that Labour would

"get round . . . the disparity between someone living alone living next door to three or four earners."

In addition, we now know that the Labour party intends to revalue every domestic property on the basis of four different factors—market value, rental value, rebuilding costs and repair and maintenance costs. It will do that every year. We have four factors and an annual revaluation. However, there is then a fifth tax. The Labour party would help single retired people living alone, so there would be a people tax as well—an old persons' register. What does it mean? How will the Labour party help old people unless it knows where the old people are living? Has the Leader of the Opposition got an answer to that question? He says that in going back to the rates system, this time the Labour party will have a system of sensible rebates. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us one thing? How much will a system of sensible rebates cost?

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) made a most telling point. The Leader of the Opposition told us how much the system of sensible rebates would cost—nothing. That is what he said. Let all those elderly people who will be helped by the system of sensible rebates know exactly how much cash is coming their way—nothing.

So it is no wonder that the Labour party is not prepared to discuss its proposals—self-evidently not with us, but apparently not even in detail with the party. That is in sharp contrast to the claim that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rightly made today that we are conducting the most important and comprehensive review of local government this century.

I appreciate the generous tribute of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). Our position is clear on this matter—the community charge will go. It will be replaced by a new local tax. We have already established a better balance between national and local taxpayers. Our new local tax will reflect the number of people in the household and the value of the property in which they live. We are consulting fully and thoroughly about the structure, finance and management of local government.

I express gratitude to many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, including the right hon. Members for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) and for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), and my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who said that we are absolutely right to consult thoroughly on this matter and at a pace which ensures the proper decisions.

If there is any doubt about the synthetic nature of the opposition that the Labour party has mounted it is that it is impossible to understand why we were kept here until 2.30 am to carry the necessary legislation when the Opposition did not divide the House on clause after clause. The fact is that the Labour party had gone home to bed.

If I described all that as the consequence of Labour policy options, I should mislead the House. There are no conclusions. The purpose of "Fair Rates" is to deceive the public about the chaotic state of Labour's thinking. During the past three and a half years, leading Labour spokesmen have given 65 different policy positions on local government finance.

As we have pointed out, the truth has never been better expressed—no one put it more clearly—than by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) when he cried in despair:

"I'm saying to the NEC policy makers . . . 'Hang on a minute, what's our policy on local government?' Putting it at its boldest, we haven't got a policy."

That is the actual truth. It was true then—in 1987—and it is true today.

The reality is not that no one has ever tried to design a policy for the Opposition. The hon. Member for Brightside certainly tried. In October 1987, the *Financial Times* reported that he had made an apparent spur-of-the-moment suggestion that fresh consideration be given to the possibility of a local income tax. Then, some Opposition Members wanted a property tax and some wanted a local income tax. There was only one way forward. In April 1988, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spelled it out:

"We shall replace the poll tax with a property tax and a local income tax"—

the smack of firm resolution. He continued:

"We have agreed these matters today."

Next, the Leader of the Opposition took a permanently personal grip of the situation. On 22 July, the right hon. Gentleman determined that the policy had to be "sophisticated". The hon. Member for Copeland quickly got the message. He began to back off from local income tax. Three days later, we read in *Hansard* that he said:

"We will dedicate an element of income tax to local government."

The hon. Member for Brightside had not been let into the secret at that stage, and said:

"There has been no change this afternoon."

Later, after two months of "sophisticating", nothing had changed. The right hon. Member for Islwyn was able to say in September:

"What we are contemplating may involve a tax based on the value of a property supplemented by a small . . . local income tax."

Enter the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), centre stage. [HON. MEMBERS:"Where is he?"] At this point, the process assumes a real sophistication. On 10 November, the hon. Gentleman told us that Labour would look at

"a range of options—some of which will be single taxes and some of which won't. . .. Nothing is set in concrete."

By then, the hon. Member for Brightside had caught up with what was going on. Of the two-tax policy, he said:

"It is politically dead. Personally, I was quite happy to bat on with it, but you must look reality in the face."

By that time, the hon. Member for Dagenham was driving ruthlessly on. On 18 January 1990, he was able to share the results with the House:

"We are making very good progress with the work we have undertaken to prepare our alternative . . . We have every confidence that in the coming months we shall reach a

conclusion that we shall be able to bring forward with confidence."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 438-39.]

Two months later, the hon. Gentleman was asked who would pay under Labour's system. He replied:

"That's the one thing we have yet to decide . . . We will reach a decision very shortly."

That was a year ago today.

It was then that the hon. Member for Dagenham realised the dangers of revealing the truth. Early in April, he declared that Labour would not reveal the details of its policy until after winning power. Some people were embarrassed by that apparent coyness, as a result of which the new policy statement lasted two weeks. Then the hon. Member for Dagenham said that Labour would certainly give people

"plenty of information in good time so that they will have some idea of what the relative size of their bill will be."

Then we marched on to July, when Labour published its "Fair Rates" document. There was not a fact in it, or a figure of any sort; the only precision that it contained was a firm pledge to return to the rating system—the very system that the Leader of the Opposition had described as the most unjust of all taxes. We got rid of that system and, however unjust Labour Members may once have considered it, they are now determined to bring it back, with rebates which—in the indelible language of the right hon. Gentleman—will be so generous that they will cost nothing. But you get nothing for nothing.

There we have it: a brief history. The Opposition have got nowhere, but they dare not admit it. They will not —cannot—come and talk to us, because they know that they will be flushed out and exposed.

I do not want in any way to suggest that the Labour party does not believe in consultation. However, although we have asked Labour to consult—all the other parties have consulted, and we have consulted their councillors up and down the country—it will not do so. That is not because Labour is against consultation in principle. The one clear statement that is worth recording can be found towards the tail end of "Fair Rates". This is what the Labour party says about consultation:

"The Labour Party intends to consult widely on the basis of the proposals set out in this paper. There is no reason why Labour should fall into the same trap as the Conservatives in announcing an immovable and predetermined policy irrespective of expert and political opinion or regardless of constructive observation. We seek to find a sensible and lasting solution which can gain the maximum consensus both inside and outside the local government arena."

That is what they said until we asked the Labour party to do it. What rank hypocrisy.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I have been listening for a long time to the right hon. Gentleman's speech. A serious matter is before the House. As £4·5 billion of public money is to be spent, the right hon. Gentleman owes it to the House to explain how it will be spent.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman knows precisely how it will be spent—on reducing the cost borne by local people. The levels, on average, will be lower than they paid in the last year of the rating system, because we intend to take £140 off the headline charge. If I am asked how many people will benefit, I can say that about 14 million people will benefit from the full £140 reduction.

The truth is that the Opposition have been flushed out. They will not talk——

Mr. Hattersley: Now that the right hon. Gentleman has attempted to answer a question, he has answered a question that I did not ask. He has also given a different answer from the one that he gave on Thursday. It is also a different answer from the one that the Leader of the House gave yesterday. Can I ask him a question that I did ask: how many beneficiaries will enjoy the £140 that he has trumpeted during the past week?

Mr. Heseltine: That is exactly the question that I did answer. When I answer the right hon. Gentleman's questions, he does not understand the answer that I give him.

The fact is that the Opposition have been flushed out —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Heseltine: The Opposition will not consult because they dare not produce the facts behind their consultation. The party of "won't pay" has become the party of "won't say". It is not simply a question of the Opposition not being prepared to answer basic questions about the cost of their proposals. The issue that the Opposition must face up to is the level to which they have brought so many Labour-controlled authorities.

At least let us be clear about this: the Opposition are not going to win this vote of confidence tonight. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Applause is not the way that we show our approbation in the House.

Mr. Heseltine: But there is a consolation prize for the Labour party. It will win the vote of no confidence that was passed today in its Labour candidates in Lambeth. The House is entitled to the latest up-to-the-minute information. Today the Labour executive kicked out 13 of Labour's councillors in Lambeth. The Labour leader, Joan Twelves, is out. The mayor, George Huish, is out. The deputy leader, John Harrison, is out. The chief whip, Julian Lewis, is out. Greg Tucker, Mrs. Twelves's partner, is out. I leave it to my right hon. and hon. Friends to interpret that for themselves; whatever he happens to be, he is out on his ear. As all those great luminaries of the Labour establishment get the chop, they have given a new political significance to the meaning of the Lambeth walk. *[Interruption.]* It is a long way to Tipperary and it is quite a long way to Sheffield as well.

Why did the Labour party stop at Lambeth? The truth is that it did not. The national anti-poll tax campaigner, Steve Nally, was heaved out as well. Let us be generous and say with one accord to the leader of the Labour party, "Well done, but why did it take you so long? Now what will you do about all the other councillors and Labour Members of Parliament who will not pay their poll tax? What will you do about the Labour party in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, which was urging us to put a spanner in the works?"

The Labour party is unfit to govern. The House has no confidence in the Labour party. It has no confidence in the leadership of that party that had so to narrow the terms of the censure motion that it became a one-issue debate. In the whole history of the Mother of Parliaments, never have we seen a motion of confidence so narrow because the Labour party was frightened to let its leader loose. He cannot be trusted, even by his own party, to cover all the national and international issues.

[Mr. Heseltine]

We have no confidence in a party which, if we could have discussed the matters, we would have shown to be prepared to bargain away our nuclear defences. We have no confidence in a party that would capitulate to union aggression or that would put up the cost of local authority finances, put up taxes, put up borrowing, and put up inflation. We have no confidence in a party which tolerated the disgrace of Lambeth council and dozens of others. We have no confidence in a party whose councillors and Members of Parliament openly flaunt the breaking of the law.

If that is the alternative, thank heavens that the House can have confidence in Her Majesty's Government. The Prime Minister has achieved more in local government reorganisation since he became Prime Minister than the Labour party has designed throughout the decade that it has been in opposition.

We can be clear. We have a choice of Government. We have a national Conservative Government in charge, on top, leading Britain forward. We have a Labour choice in local government—wasteful, divisive and expensive. There is no contest at all. We shall make sure that the Opposition parties stay on the opposition Benches and we shall ensure that we drive them into opposition increasingly in local government as well.

This House has confidence in the Government, and I invite it to join the Government in the Lobby tonight.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 238, Noes 358.

Division No. 106] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*

Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the motions on statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

Local Government (Scotland)

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991, dated 4th March 1991, a copy of which was laid before the House on 6th March, be approved.

Rating and Valuation

That the draft Scottish Power plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Scottish Nuclear Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Mines and Quarries (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Mercury Communications Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Industrial and Freight Transport (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Caravan Sites and Pitches (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft British Gas plc. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft British Alcan Primary and Recycling Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

That the draft Scottish Hydro-Electric plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 11th March, be approved.

Public Health

That the draft Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 Statutory Sum Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.

Libraries

That the draft Public Lending Right (Increase of Limit) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.

Government Trading Funds

That the draft Central Office of Information Trading Fund Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 26th February, be approved.

That the draft Buying Agency Trading Fund Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th February, be approved.

That the draft Property Services Agency Supplies Trading Fund Order 1976 (Revocation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th February, be approved.

Representation of the People

That the draft Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 5th March, be approved.

Local Government

That the draft House in Multiple Occupation (Charges for Registration Schemes) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

Rating and Valuation

That the draft Electricity Industry (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

County Courts

That the draft High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 20th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees)

Common Fisheries Policy

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10541/90 on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP); supports the Government's aim to participate fully in preparatory discussion for the mid-term review of the CFP; and endorses its approach to continue to make adjustments and improvements to the CFP to deal with existing and future problems within the framework established by the 1983 CFP settlement.

Community Social Measures

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8073/90 on organisation of working time, 8792/90 and 4112/91 on the protection of pregnant women at work and 8075/90 on temporary and mobile work sites; endorses the conclusions of the Madrid and Rome European Councils that measures taken in the field of social affairs should have full regard to the effects on job creation, to the principle of subsidiarity and to the diversity of national traditions and practices; and supports the Government's view that the proposals on temporary and mobile work sites broadly meet these criteria, that the proposals on the organisation of working time do not, and that the proposals on the protection of pregnant women at work require to be more closely focused on health and safety in order to do so.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Compulsory use of Seat Belts

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9228/88 and 10333/90 on compulsory use of seat belts; notes that their provisions are broadly in accord with present and proposed domestic legislation; and endorses the Government's intention to seek amendment of the proposals so that any adopted Directive neither imposes unacceptable constraints nor limits the scope for further action perceived by Parliament to be necessary without prejudice to the question of competence of the Community in relation to road safety.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor).

10.15 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask whether the Leader of the House would be willing to give further consideration to this very important constitutional point, and is it in order for the Leader of the House to comment?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I can help the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). These issues have been the subject of some initial discussion through the usual channels, but, as I have pointed out to my hon. Friend in the House before, when one embarks on a new process, as we are doing now, issues can sometimes arise that we must consider. I have said that we shall certainly be having a review before the end of the summer and that we may wish to review some of the issues earlier than that. My hon. Friend's point could be one of the issues that I shall look at with a bit of experience of the work of the relevant Standing Committees. I have made a note of what my hon. Friend has said. That is certainly one of the points that I shall look at.

Mr. Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to move his amendment?

Mr. Taylor: In the circumstances, certainly not, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

British Nationality

10.16 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move,

That the British Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 183), dated 4th February 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be revoked.

The Government are proposing substantial increases in the fees for naturalisation and registration. Those increases would be substantial even if the Home Office offered a speedy and efficient service, but the service is neither speedy nor efficient. It may be for the convenience of the House if I state now that I shall not seek to press a Division on the regulations, but it is important that the House debates what is an extremely important matter to many British citizens living in this country.

Delays are part of the immigration system of this country. Some suspect that delays are deliberately used as an instrument of control. Efficiency in the immigration and nationality department has been one of the many casualties of the Government's term of office. The Government, as the operators and employers of those who work in the immigration and nationality department, must accept the blame for that inefficiency.

In some ways, this debate is about value for money or, rather the complete lack of it. Last year, the Select Committee on Home Affairs, in its fifth report of the 1989-90 Session, paper 319, published another damning report on the work of the immigration and nationality department, condemning the Home Office's quality of service, especially for the very services for which the public will now have to pay more as a result of the regulations. The Select Committee said that the delays were "indefensible". That is how the all-party committee described the situation now prevailing in that department in Lunar house, in Croydon.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does my hon. Friend realise that, if completions of naturalisation and registration cases continued at their current rate of 28 a month, it would take until the year 2084 before all the cases were completed? Does my hon. Friend agree that that is disgraceful?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. This matter worries many of my hon. Friend's constituents and other Opposition Members. As I said, the Home Affairs Select Committee said that the delays were "indefensible". That Committee was not impressed by the explanations which the Government offered in evidence or by the promises that the Home Office would try to do better—for good reason, as it turns out.

The position has not improved over the past few months—indeed, it has deteriorated further. The delay in dealing with claims for naturalisation was, on average, about 27 months in June 1990, when the report was published. By Monday this week, 25 March, the delay had increased to 36 months—three years to deal with an application. In no other service would that be tolerated or be considered remotely acceptable.

On the same Monday, the delay in dealing with registration matters was two years, yet the Government propose that the fees for that service should rise—from £60 to £85 for registration, and from £60 to £135 for some naturalisations. It seems that the Government are charging more for a poorer service, yet they say that they model themselves on the private sector and operate in the marketplace. Surely they must realise that the immigration and nationality department would be out of business within weeks if it operated in any marketplace.

I look forward to hearing what the Government propose. This public service lies entirely within the Government's control. They operate the department and could improve services if they chose. I think that I can safely say that in no other service is there such a glaring example of Government complacency and Government inefficiency. Perhaps other hon. Members or even Ministers can point to another example, but I am not aware of one.

The Home Affairs Select Committee said:

"Delays are particularly unacceptable in a fee-based service."

Yet we have greater delay and higher fees. It is ironic that this service is presided over by the ex-chairman of the Conservative party. The fees are paid up front and, in effect, the Home Office receives an interest-free loan from the applicants. The deposit is quite substantial.

One effect of the regulations is that, if applications are unsuccessful, a substantially increased part of the fee will be forfeited. It is unreasonable that a person who applies for registration or naturalisation should find, after two or three years, that he has failed and loses quite a substantial sum.

Whoever wrote the explanatory note which accompanies the regulations certainly had a way with words. The explanatory note says:

"The fee payable in respect of an application for registration as a citizen . . . is increased from £10 to £60, while the fee payable in respect of such registration itself is reduced from £50 to £25."

Although there was a small increase in one respect, one would think that there was a reduction. However, the amount of money that will be forfeited in the event of an unsuccessful application has been increased considerably.

The Home Affairs Select Committee identified several problems in Lunar house, where the immigration and nationality department is based, for which the Government should take some responsibility and which they should put right. About a year ago, when I visited Lunar house, I was struck by the considerable staff turnover. By and large, the work is not particularly pleasurable, in that more often than not the Home Office tends to say no. In addition, certainly a year ago, there was a large amount of office space in Croydon and it was found that other employers could offer more attractive employment than the Government. Understandably, anyone who was sitting in Lunar house and looking around at the people going into the banks and insurance companies would realise that there was a more attractive option then making a career in Lunar house.

The Government have not dealt with staff conditions and staff training. The latter is particularly important when there is high turnover, as experience is needed to deal with applications. There could be catastrophic implications for an individual if his application failed.

The Minister should also consider the possibility of moving the immigration and nationality department from Croydon to another part of England—the midlands would be an obvious location. I know that that matter has been considered by the Government and other agencies, but perhaps the Minister will say something about that

tonight, because that move might address the problem of high staff turnover. Perhaps the Minister could also tell us why the Birmingham office, which was heralded two years ago, was eventually acquired but did not open for more than a year because money was not available.

When one works in an atmosphere where delays are endemic and one knows that the Government hold the work done in the immigration and nationality department in fairly low esteem, it means staff morale can be low. The Government must accept responsibility for that. The service of that department is desperately needed by many of our citizens. They are entitled to a first-class service, not a second-class one.

In evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee a Home Office official said:

"nationality work does to some extent stand on its feet".

Last year the Home Office almost made a profit on that aspect of its work, but that profit is indefensible when the Home Office is not delivering the service to match the high fees charged. Perhaps the Minister can tell us on what basis the fees are calculated. The nationality division costs about £5·9 million, which is almost covered by the fees received, yet that division's staff are engaged in other work—they are not wholly dedicated to processing applications.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has said:

"The principle of a cost-based service is only acceptable if a prompt service is provided."

It is right to say that, but no prompt service is offered, nor has it been for some time. The Select Committee also noted:

"Compensation for poor service is widely accepted in the private sector."

That is true, and it should be more widely accepted, particularly in the case of the immigration and nationality department.

For some time, the Labour party has accepted the principle of compensation for poor public service—we have set that out in our consumers' charter. That charter must be right and I do not believe that the Minister will condemn it tonight, because, lo and behold, the Prime Minister discovered exactly the same thing in his speech about mashed potatoes last weekend in Stockport.

We shall set targets for the Home Office for all aspects of its work. For entry clearance work, there should be strict time limits to deal with applications and similar time limits for issuing explanatory statements in the event of an unsuccessful application. Appeals should also be subject to strict time limits—similar to those that are commonplace in the normal civil law procedure of the various jurisdictions of the United Kingdom.

The delays that are part and parcel of the immigration procedures of this country are indefensible. They are bad for the public and for those who work in that sector. They should be tackled by the Government. Targets should be imposed so that the public are left in no doubt as to the quality of service they are entitled to expect. The Labour party believes that people should be guaranteed their money back, in whole or in part, in the event of failure on the part of the Home Office to honour the obligations incumbent upon it. If the Government set such targets and offer such compensation, it would be good for the public, good for staff morale and good for the service.

What have the Government got to say about those proposals? Not a lot, I fear. Last week I asked the Minister to let me know when he intended to comment on the various recommendations made by the Home Affairs Select Committee. He replied:

"The Government undertook in their reply to the report . . . to issue regularly bulletins on the progress of nationality work. The first such bulletin will issue shortly."—[*Offical Report*, 25 March 1991, Vol. 188, c. *269*.]

Nine months have elapsed since the Select Committee reported, but no bulletin has been issued and the Minister is unable to tell us when he will respond to the many useful suggestions of the Select Committee. That is yet another example of delay and of the Government's apparent inability to make up their mind how they should respond to some extremely sensible suggestions made by many hon. Members who are sympathetic to the Government.

The position on outstanding applications is particularly worrying. More than 16,000 applications for naturalisation lodged before January 1988 have still not been dealt with. Some 12,000 applications lodged between January 1988 and the end of December 1988 have not been dealt with. More than 16,500 applications lodged after January 1989 have not yet been dealt with. That is 46,000 applications which are still awaiting processing. That is clearly intolerable. Some 15,500 applications for registration have not yet been dealt with. Surely no Government could be satisfied with that. Surely no Government could rest and say that they are not prepared to tackle what is increasingly becoming an irritant to large numbers of people living in this country.

This debate is about efficiency and value for money. Unfortunately, we are getting neither of those in the service that is being provided by the Home Office. Perhaps the Minister could tell us what progress is being made with computerisation. Or are the Government being typically complacent in this branch of the service? The Minister tells us about the importance of gathering the fees and revenues due to the Home Office, but what exactly is being done to recover the large sums of money now outstanding in penalties imposed under the Immigration (Carriers' Liabilities) Act 1987? Surely those sums could help to defray the costs of the operations of the Home Office if the Government were of a mind to do something about collecting the arrears, which run to many millions of pounds.

The matter is important not only in terms of providing a service to members of the public or reducing the irritation and anger felt by many people who find that their applications are not being dealt with by the Home Office. It will be of crucial importance once the single market is completed in 1992. The Minister will be aware that one's ability to move around Europe will depend to a great extent on the status that one enjoys. If one is not a citizen or does not have right of abode or otherwise the right to move around Europe, people in this country who want to work in different parts of the European Community, which is the idea behind the single market, may find that they cannot do so simply because their applications have not been processed because of bureaucratic delay and red tape. That sort of inefficiency is inexcusable, and it will cause great anxiety and hardship to many people, especially once the single market is in full operation at the end of next year.

In this short debate, the Minister will have to come up with firm proposals on how he intends to tackle the unjustified and intolerable problem that has been created over the past few years. It must give him no satisfaction to

[Mr. Darling]

preside over such a mess and such an unsatisfactory situation. An efficient system is needed—one provided at a reasonable cost. In my submission, the Government have failed on every count.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The last time that fees for citizenship applications were raised was in April 1986—almost five years ago. It is right that the House should take this opportunity to discuss the increases which are now prescribed.

I hope to cover the main points raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), who asked about fee setting. The current fee setting system replaced one which simply threw up cash surpluses or shortfalls and which was criticised by the Home Affairs Select Committee in 1983. We now have an accrual accounting method whereby income from applications is credited to the fees account stage by stage as the work is done. Interest credited for as yet unapplied fee payments is subtracted from processing costs so that applicants rather than the Exchequer get this benefit.

Fee levels are set to recover expected costs in each category of application and no more, but calculations have, of course, to be made on the basis of forecast levels of output and costs and it would be impossible to break exactly even all the time. In some years, therefore, our outturn accounts show a surplus, and in others a loss. Taken together over the six years from 1984-85 to 1989-90 the trading accounts show a net surplus in the order of £250,000. Our estimate is, however, that there will be a loss in the 12 months just ended and that, if fees are unchanged, a greater one in the coming year.

It is against that background that we have reviewed fee levels and have, as the Select Committee recommended, tried to remove any element of cross-subsidy. We expect that the revised fee levels will provide sufficient income to meet the cost of processing applications at least over the period from March 1991 to March 1992.

The level of fees for the three categories—residence naturalisation, spouse naturalisation and registration—have varied over the years. For example, the fee for naturalisation on grounds of residence was set at £200 in April 1982. It was reduced to £160 in April 1984 and then increased to £170 in April 1986. We do not intend any increase to that fee as a result of the present review. I hope that the House will welcome the fact that about one third of our customers will therefore pay less than their predecessors did eight or nine years ago to achieve British citizenship.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister used the word "customer". In November 1987, when he introduced the Immigration Bill, the then Home Secretary referred to providing a good customer service for those who went to Lunar house. Does the Minister believe, having listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) describe the disgraceful delays at Lunar house and in Liverpool, that he is giving his customers a good customer service?

Mr. Lloyd: We are giving our customers a good service, but it is not nearly as speedy as I and others would like. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central asked how fees were set and, as I am responding to him, I shall concentrate on that point until I move on to the service and, in particular, the speed of service.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Can the Minister tell us the impact on fees of the requirement to use detectives to carry out inquiries and interviews associated with nationality? I have always wondered why CID officers are employed on that work. Would not it be better, more effective, cheaper and quicker to use Home Office civilians than detectives who would be better employed chasing criminals, especially in view of the soaring crime rate that we have learnt about within the past 24 hours?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not have such a breakdown, but I am fairly confident that the proportion is small. We try to organise the service with sufficient flexibility that we do not use police officers and make investigations unless there seems to be a good reason for it. In most cases, there is not.

The fee for registration was set at £70 as long ago as April 1982. In April 1984, it was reduced to £55 and there was a small increase to £60 in April 1986. As a result of this latest review, it will now rise to £85.

The other main fee level, relating to naturalisation on the grounds of marriage, attracted a fee of £70 in 1982. That was reduced to £55 in April 1984 and increased to £60 in 1986. We now propose a substantial increase from £60 to £135.

When in 1984 and again in 1986 we assessed the amount of work that such applications would entail, we had little experience on which to base our assessment. Many married women, for example, were still exercising their rights to registration as British citizens under section 8 of the British Nationality Act 1981.

It was only with the ending of the transitional rights on 31 December 1987 that a clearer picture emerged of the cost of processing applications. Our latest analysis showed that the average cost of a successful application under section 6(2) is £143·95, whereas we charged only £60. Applicants in this category were, in effect, being subsidised by applicants in other categories. The rise is large, but consistent with the principle that applicants should meet the average cost of processing their own category of application.

However, we believe that it is right to continue the concession for members of the same family applying at the same time. Thus, couples applying together for naturalisation will continue to pay one single fee, as will minor children of the same parent applying together for registration. The continuation of the concessions is a real and practical help to families and an encouragement to them to apply for British citizenship together.

The major change to the fees introduced by these regulations, and mentioned by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, is to charge unsuccessful applicants the cost of processing their applications. Hitherto, unsuccessful applicants have been charged only a minimal £10. In fact, the careful deliberation and the prolonged inquiries that can take place before an application is refused can take almost as much, and sometimes more, time and cost more money than one which is successful.

We believe that it is unfair to expect applicants who meet the requirements of the Act to pay the costs of those who fail, and we see no reason why the taxpayer should continue to subsidise them either. All unsuccessful applicants who apply after 1 March 1991 will have to meet

the full average cost of processing their applications. That will be £60 for registration, £130 for naturalisation on the grounds of marriage and £135 for other naturalisation.

I do not believe that these fees will deter people from applying for British citizenship. Those who are properly qualified will not be affected. It may help other potential applicants to give more thorough consideration to whether they meet the unwaivable statutory requirements; a reduction in the number of ineligible applications can only be a good thing.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has said—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central referred to the subject—that the time taken to process citizenship applications was far too long. The Opposition have argued that it would be wrong to increase fees until a speedier service can be provided. I accept that the delays are far too long, and—as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will know—I have rehearsed the reasons on several occasions. As he did not mention the position, I think that one can understand it only if I briefly outline those reasons again.

There was an unprecedented number of applications for citizenship in 1987. Most of them were for registration under the transitional provision of the British Nationality Act 1981, in which the entitlement to be registered ended, in most cases, on 31 December 1987. A large number of those applying had had many years in which to make applications for British citizenship, in some cases since 1973, but they left it until the last minute.

The Government expected an increase in applications for registration and thought that about 64,000 would be received. They also expected to receive 26,000 or so naturalisation applications. Some 16 additional staff were provided to cater for the extra work. In fact, 210,000 registration applications were lodged. In addition, the publicity, as the closing date for applications approached, also attracted 70,000 applicants for naturalisation, even though their rights were not affected by the ending of the transitional period. The total number of all applications was, in fact, about five times the number received in 1986 and about three times the estimated number—resulting in a waiting period of three years. As the hon. Gentleman said, that is the current waiting time.

Mr. Darling: We all appreciate the problems that arose at the end of 1987, but can I take it from what the Minister was saying that, although it is proposed that the fees will go up as a result of the regulations, we cannot look forward to an improvement in the quality of service or the amount of time taken to process the applications be reduced? The thrust of what I was saying was that it seemed to be unreasonable to expect people to pay more for a pretty shoddy service.

Mr. Lloyd: I shall return to that point. There is a logical misapprehension in the case that the hon. Gentleman is making. The whole delay has been caused not by slowness in processing over time, but by the large backlog that was created at the end of 1987 and which has held everything back since. When that backlog is overcome, the average statistical time of processing will come down sharply.

Mr. Darling: I do not want to labour the point, but I am sure that the Minister will accept that, if he took a suit to be dry cleaned and he was told that it would take six months or a year to do it, he would not care why that situation came about: he would simply want to get his suit cleaned as quickly as possible. Exactly the same situation applies in Croydon. I appreciate that there were difficulties which are unlikely to arise again, but the customers, as the Minister calls them, want to know why their applications cannot be dealt with a little more speedily than three years.

Mr. Lloyd: If I were the customer or the applicant, I should think in exactly the same way. But if I were the Opposition spokesman who hoped to take over the business in a short time, I should want to look behind the problem to see what caused it. I should come to the conclusion that appearances did not describe where the difficulties were. The difficulties were at the end of 1987 and have not occurred since then. I shall return to that point.

To help deal with the processing of the applications a new nationality office was opened in Liverpool, in August 1988. The hon. Gentleman wondered what had become of the suggestion that it should be moved from Croydon. We decided to move the office to Liverpool, and primarily it handled the transitional application cases—those are the ones that came in at the end of 1987—with the target of taking decisions on all of them by 31 March 1990.

In fact, the Liverpool nationality office took decisions on all its registration cases by 19 January 1990, except those where replies from applicants were still awaited. Those cases consisted of those where we are waiting for the applicant to forward the fee, or to swear an oath of allegiance, or to send some other documentary evidence to establish an entitlement. The number of such cases is gradually being whittled away, and at the moment only 4,125 remain outstanding.

When the Liverpool nationality office had largely completed the processing of the registration applications, its staff were retrained in order to process applications for naturalisation. At the same time, we decided to move the base for dealing with citizenship matters from Croydon to Liverpool. In the long term, that will reduce the cost of processing applications, although I have to say that we underestimated the short-term effect that transferring work from Croydon to Liverpool would have on production, and waiting times have not fallen as quickly as we should have liked.

But the number of outstanding cases has nevertheless continued to drop—from 120,000 at the end of 1989 to 86,000 at the end of 1990. At the end of February, the backlog was down to 80,000. During that time, more than 29,000 fresh applications were being made. We are now concluding cases at the rate of 5,000 a month. Our determination to clear those cases as quickly as possible is evidenced by the increase of staffing levels in Liverpool from 140 to 205 in the coming financial year.

The transfer of work from Croydon to Liverpool was to have been completed by the end of March, but we have decided to keep a nucleus of staff, about 80, in Croydon until later this year to help reduce the backlog more quickly. We are taking other steps, too, to reduce the time taken to deal with applications. We have reviewed our operating procedures and the way in which the nationality division is organised to ensure that when we begin our consideration of an application, there will be no further avoidable delay in determining it.

Waiting times, currently 36 months for naturalisation applications, are—as I and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said—far too long, but the underlying situation has been steadily improving. All the huge

[Mr. Lloyd]

overhang of 1987 cases, and most of the 1988 cases, have now been started and we can expect that most of them will be determined within the next few months. *[Laughter.]*

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) laughs, but he will understand, if he thinks about it rather than jeers, that the essential, if the average time is to come down——

Mr. Vaz: It has gone up.

Mr. Lloyd: It has gone up because we have not yet finished the applications made at the end of 1987—a huge influx of applications, five times as high as normal.

The reason why the waiting time appears to increase is that that huge number of applications came in at the same time. Therefore, until they are settled the average time will increase, but, as soon as they are out of the system, it will start to drop sharply. I know that the hon. Member for Leicester, East does not want to listen to what I am saying, because he is anxious to make his own remarks, but I suggest that, if he reflects on the figures for applications that came in since 1987, and the movement since then, he will realise that when the overhang is removed the average waiting time must, and will, come down sharply.

Mr. Vaz: So sophisticated is the way in which the Minister manipulates and massages the figures that I think that his next portfolio will be Secretary of State for Employment. If he reads the evidence of his own civil servants to the Select Committee for Home Affairs, he will know that they have admitted, on his behalf, that they got the planning stages completely wrong. The responsibility for the disaster of 1987, when there was a huge influx of applications, rests with the Home Office, because it failed to plan properly. That is what his civil servants said. What the Minister should have done then is employ more staff.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that the Home Office did not predict the size of the influx in 1987, but I hope that he will also accept that that influx was from people who might have put in their applications at any time during preceding years. It suggests that the absence of a British passport, at least for them—whatever annoyance and irritation their presence in the queue is causing for those who came later—was no great hardship. Otherwise they would have applied earlier.

The backlog of applications is being reduced; and I am quite sure that we shall see the benefits in shorter waiting times later this year.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I think that the Minister is being a little unfair when he says that people could have applied much earlier. The fact of the matter is that a deadline was set by his office, which forced people to take a decision on whether to apply. Additionally, the increasingly unpleasant experiences of many people, permanently and legally resident in this country, while trying to travel around Europe on a non-British or non-European Community passport, more or less forced them into getting an EC passport to travel freely. I think that the Minister should think more carefully before he makes that sort of remark.

Mr. Lloyd: The sort of remark that I make is self-evidently true. As there was an opportunity for most of those people who applied at the end of 1987 to apply much earlier, they did not find it inconvenient not to have a British passport. The logic of that is so clear that even the hon. Gentleman, fair-minded as I know he is, will be able to accept it. However, I do not view that with any satisfaction or as an acceptance of the fact that there are delays. The delays are unacceptable to us. That is why we have made changes to reduce the waiting time. I accept that delay can be a considerable nuisance for some people who have to wait and who need to travel.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, if we receive representations that show that an applicant is being caused considerable difficulties by delay, we are willing to bring forward the application, and to give it a measure of priority. A number of hon. Members know that, because I have responded in that way to representations made by them.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): My hon. Friend may have already answered my question, but has the Home Office given any thought to those who are caught in the middle of this terrible delay, and who may have strong personal reasons for travelling abroad? Is there any system that will allow them to obtain temporary documents, or any way in which the Home Office can help bona fide cases without prejudicing later chances of naturalisation?

Mr. Lloyd: Most people who apply for naturalisation have a passport from their country of origin, which will enable them to travel. If they want to travel to a destination to which it is difficult for them to travel with that passport, we regard that as a good reason for giving them priority, and we do so if representations are made to us.

Mr. Darling: Like—probably—most other hon. Members, I have written to the Minister on behalf of constituents who find that they cannot travel because they lack the necessary documentation: for instance, a British passport. If a compelling reason can be produced, someone will go and retrieve what is needed; unfortunately, however, it takes some time for the Home Office to reply to letters, and someone then has to wade through the papers in Lunar house to find the application concerned. I accept that people try to be helpful, but the best idea —which may require extra resources—is to try to get rid of the backlog so that we do not have to debate it again and again in the future.

Mr. Lloyd: I have two answers to what the hon. Gentleman has said. First, if he has advanced the case for priority treatment of a constituent and the delay has continued although the priority itself has been accorded, I should be grateful if he would let me know; I should like to follow that up. Secondly, we have now changed the procedure. The hon. Gentleman referred to this earlier, and—by implication—in his intervention. Now, when we receive applications, the passport is examined and the required information taken from it; the passport is then returned. It does not lie in a file in Lunar house or Liverpool. The hon. Gentleman is right, in that some remain from the earlier period, but they will be returned on request. I should be concerned to learn of long delays in that regard, and I should like to know of any such cases that the hon. Gentleman has encountered.

Following the recent Select Committee report, we are arranging for the production of periodic bulletins about the current state of the backlog. Copies will be made

available to the press, and for distribution by organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality and the citizens advice bureaux. The first issue will be published—I was going to say "shortly", but an earlier "shortly" has already been quoted, so I shall say "in the next two or three weeks" instead. I believe that that will help to keep those in the queue better informed about progress.

Returning to another point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, let me stress that the revised fee levels will affect only those who apply on or after 1 March 1991, and that, unless there is a massive increase in the rate of applications that we cannot now foresee, new applicants can expect to receive a far speedier service than we have been able to offer in the past. We plan to carry out a further review of fee levels early next year. That will enable us to consider the effect of our revised procedures and of the transfer of work to Liverpool, and it will ensure that the fee costs are properly and fairly shared. At that stage, the House will again have the opportunity to debate any proposed changes in the fee levels and the average time that it takes to meet applications.

I believe that the increases are fully justified and that it is right that the processing costs should be borne by the applicants in each category. I am confident that the House will take the same view.

10.59 pm

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): The House knows that a considerable number of people from the Indian sub-continent have settled in my constituency. The long delay in achieving naturalisation is a source of considerable worry.

I do not know whether the Minister really understands why people did not immediately apply for British citizenship when it was first offered. For many families the reasons are complex. If people go abroad for lengthy periods, British nationality provides them with no advantage. Moreover, an Indian may retain his Indian nationality in Britain and show no inclination to take British citizenship. I found out in conversations with civil servants and with one of the Minister's predecessors that, if an Indian takes British citizenship, he can lose his right to property in India.

Due to the troubles in the Punjab, at one time it was much easier to travel as an Indian national, with an Indian passport, to see relatives and attend family occasions such as weddings and funerals in India. Under earlier legislation, no restrictions were placed on job and business opportunities. Sometimes the wife and the children, but not the breadwinner, took British citizenship.

The Minister referred to the Home Office's British nationality division and said that, on 20 February 1991, it admitted that the average waiting time for naturalisation applications was 36 months. I am informed that it is 32 months. However, as the Minister suggested, that is far too long.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The 36 months is the length of time that registration or naturalisation applications have taken. Those coming up now were made at the end of 1987. The applications took a very long time—three years. However, as we are now well into dealing with the 1988 applications, those made afterwards will take much less time to deal with. The period will fall sharply. We are at about the peak now.

Mr. Bidwell: One hopes that that is so and that the Minister's optimism will bear fruit. Such a long waiting period is absolutely disgraceful; it cannot be described just as a matter for regret.

I emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) about the EC. There will be much more movement within the Community, not just to take holidays but to take up job opportunities as EC citizens.

I pay tribute to the staff in the Minister's office for the excellent co-operation that I have enjoyed over the years. I always take the opportunity in these debates to pay them a tribute. The staff in the Foreign Office and in the Minister's Department are helpful in assisting hon. Members, although they cannot work miracles. If the regulations result in additional staff, and if the optimism of the Minister bears fruit, we shall all be much happier.

I remember a case that was given consideration out of turn. It involved a young woman working in this country for a company which had branches in Germany. She was told that she could not have a promotion within the company because she was not then an EC citizen, which was required under the rules relating to the movement of labour.

Commonwealth citizens enjoy democratic rights and can sit in the House, if elected. For many years an Australian citizen was a Member. I refer to my neighbour, Mr. Kerr, who held an Australian passport to his dying day. Everyone should understand that that can happen and should not moan about people not taking out British citizenship.

We are entering a new phase of life, when many young people who have not yet secured British passports and who are not members of the EC may be handicapped in work opportunities because they cannot take up posts without being EC citizens. That point has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central and must be considered. As we go into the single market, there will be a big leap towards economic integration. Leaving monetary integration aside, because that is a thorny question, there will be greater mingling of the people of Europe than has taken place over the past decade.

I hope that everything that the Minister has put before the House bears fruit. I wish him luck. If he is not successful, we will be on his tail again.

11.7 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell). I agree wholeheartedly with his comments about the private office of the Minister. I should not like any of my subsequent comments, which will not be as kind, to reflect on the work of his staff, whom I have always found to be extremely courteous and efficient.

I, too, share the deep concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) about the way in which the Department is being run. As I said in my intervention, in November 1987 the then Home Secretary introduced the Immigration Act 1988. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and I were on the Standing Committee. When introducing the legislation, the then Home Secretary spoke about providing a good customer service, as though Lunar house were a branch of Marks and Spencer. If it were, and if the Minister was working on a performance-related salary, he

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

would have to hand back to the state everything that he has earned over the past two and a half years, because he has not completed the tasks that were set him.

The Minister was right to quote the recommendations of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, whose chairman, the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) is in the Chamber. He will know that every Select Committee report that has been published since 1987—I cannot claim to have been a member of the Committee before then—has condemned the work of the Home Office. I did not engineer the condemnation. The Select Committee is an all-party group and the concern of hon. Members on both sides of the House was obvious, first because of the scandalous delays at Lunar house due to the misjudgment by Home Office officials of the number of applications in 1987, and subsequently because of the utter and complete failure of the Minister and his Department to come to terms with the deep crisis that is gripping the Home Office's immigration and nationality department.

Yet the Minister is seeking to raise fees, albeit with a half-hearted apology. He says that it is unacceptable that the delay is now 36 months. Anyone else would describe it as three years. After all, 36 months is three years. The Minister should be honest about the catastrophe at Lunar house. He says that the number of outstanding applications has been reduced to 80,000, as though it were a tremendous achievement. The reality is that it is a disgrace. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central said, no other Government Department would find itself dealing with such long delays and such a considerable backlog. The Minister and the Home Office get away with it because the House debates these measures late at night when few hon. Members can participate.

The Minister told us that there is a backlog because so many "customers" made their applications in 1987. If he had read the evidence that was given by his senior officials at the hearings of the Select Committee, he would know that they admitted that the Home Office had made a mistake. They accepted that they had not planned the process properly. They said that if they had had the chance to repeat the exercise, they would have planned it differently.

The Minister talked about the Liverpool office as though that was a great gift. When I tried to telephone those who run the Members' correspondence and inquiries unit at Liverpool, I could not get an answer. I had to ring the Minister's private office and ask one of his assistants to call me. Eventually, a member of the Minister's Department managed to speak to the unit on the telephone. When I came to speak to someone from the unit, I asked why there was no direct line for the use of Members. The official said, "We have not been able to install a direct line because BT has delayed the installation." That is an example of the sort of excuses that are being made by officials at Lunar house and at Liverpool. If that is the way in which they treat Members of this place, they must be treating Members' constituents in an equally appalling manner.

The Minister has asked us to explain the hardship that is caused if an applicant has to wait for 36 months, or three years. I shall give him an example. Let us say that one of my constituents is of Indian origin, happens to hold an Indian passport and makes an application for naturalisation. He sends his passport with his application, as requested by the Home Office, and the passport expires within the three years of delay. In that event, the Indian Government will not issue another passport to the applicant because they will want to be satisfied that the individual has not applied for naturalisation. If the applicant wants to travel urgently, the Minister might say, "Get in touch with my Department and a travelling document will be issued." That is all very well, but it will take a long time for that document to be issued. Indeed, the same procedures are followed in issuing a travelling document on the basis of any emergency as those that are observed if a person applies for naturalisation.

The Minister has not been honest with the House, to the extent that increasing the fees means that the Department will continue to make a profit, notwithstanding the way in which it operates. The Minister shakes his head, but the Department will make a profit as a result of the fees that are charged. If it makes a profit, it should ensure that applicants receive the best possible service that can be made available to them. It is clear that the present service does not fall into that category.

Constituents come to my surgery to question the delays. If I write to the Minister on behalf of a constituent, six weeks will pass before I receive a reply. He will explain that there are delays because of the many applications that were made in 1987. I send the Minister's reply to my constituent and there is a further delay while he or she responds. If the Minister thinks that matters can proceed quickly whan a passport is at Lunar house, he does not know how the system works. I tabled a question a short while ago to ask the Minister how many passports were held at Lunar house. Even his Department does not know how many are held there. We cannot be sure, therefore, that some of the passports are not being held there for longer than is necessary.

This morning I attended the Committee considering the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) and supported by other members of the Select Committee, dealing with another aspect of Home Office responsibilities. The Minister said that he wanted to co-operate and be seen to be friendly to new initiatives. I welcome that co-operation and it is untrue for people to think that every time I speak in an immigration debate I automatically criticise the Minister. On some immigration matters, he has been flexible, after persuasion. I do not automatically condemn everything he does, because this morning he was helpful. In that spirit of compromise, will he consider a way in which he can be helpful to some of my elderly constituents who have applied for citizenship?

When people apply for citizenship they have to satisfy a criterion that they are able to speak English. Many of those who have applied in my constituency are elderly Asians who have only ever spoken Gujarati. In other parts of the country they may have spoken only Punjabi or Urdu. At their age, they cannot be expected to learn English simply to satisfy a requirement of the British citizenship rules. Will the Minister look carefully at that? There are elderly Asian men and women in my constituency who communicate with their families in Gujarati, are able to go to shops in Leicester in which the shopkeepers speak their language and go about their daily lives, watch videos and so on. They are able to do all that

with their language and there is no reason why, at their advanced age, they should have to learn a new language in order to satisfy those requirements.

I know that it remains in the Minister's discretion to grant them citizenship. Will he please look at the possibility of amending the regulations to ensure that they are not made to satisfy that criterion? If I were to introduce a Bill—if I can—in the same way as the hon. Member for Westminster, North, whose Bill was debated this morning with the full support of the Government, I hope that the Minister will show it equal support.

In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell), the Minister said that he hoped that this matter would be resolved and that the delays would be ended. Will he let us know what he regards as an acceptable time for people to wait before being given citizenship? Three years is too long. In fact, one or two years is too long. The Minister should aim to apply the same targets as the Government are using in other areas of policy to his Department so as to end the misery and hardship suffered by so many people because of the way in which his Department operates.

11.17 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Minister was good enough to write to me on 22 March in reply to a letter from me dated 25 February about the naturalisation application of a constituent I shall call Mr. A. The Minister said:

"You will be pleased to hear that this case is receiving detailed attention. I should mention, however, that Mr. . . . has previously been refused naturalisation because he did not appear to have sufficient knowledge of English to meet the statutory requirement. To check the current position it is likely, therefore, that our inquiries will include an interview. We will ask the local police to arrange this.

I am afraid I cannot say how much longer it will now take to determine Mr. . . .'s application. When we have completed all the appropriate inquiries we shall, of course, let his solicitors know the decision as soon as possible."

In reply to an intervention, I understood the Minister to say that the police were not automatically involved in inquiries. It is absurd for the police to be required to interview that applicant to satisfy themselves whether he has sufficient English to met the statutory requirements. It seems a criminal waste of police time when crime is causing so much public concern and when today the Home Office and Home Office Ministers have been busily trying to persuade the public that they are not responsible for the cime wave going on around us. Why are CID officers—detective sergeants or detective constables—required to undertake inquiries in connection with British citizenship? It would be much more appropriate for civilian officials to be employed. It would also be less intimidatory. Detectives would be freed to chase criminals, and in my view the service would be much better.

Tonight the Press Association is reporting a parliamentary reply in which the Home Secretary announces the establishment of an executive agency for the issue of passports. The Home Secretary has made a commitment that passports will be issued within 20 working days. That comes as very good news to many of my constituents, who have had to wait months and months for passports. If passports can be issued within 20 working days, there is absolutely no reason why it should take more than six months to grant naturalisation and citizenship.

I appeal to the Minister to give urgent consideration to the question of further decentralisation of citizenship inquiry work. Why should we not have an office in each region—the east midlands, Yorkshire, the north, Scotland, Wales, and so on? That would bring the service very much closer to the customers, who at present have to put up with a very bad service. I am sure that decentralisation would be very welcome to the Minister's officials. Certainly it would be very welcome to our constituents.

There is no doubt that the fee increases that we are being asked to approve are totally unjustified. This is the rip-off of the century. The Home Office and its Ministers stand accused of a mix of excessive profiteering and breathtaking incompetence. If they were the subject of a "Which?" consumer investigation, they would qualify for every booby prize there has ever been.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's magnificent flow, but I should point out that our single objective, following advice given to us by the Select Committee, is simply to recover costs.

Mr. Madden: In 1987, the Department made a profit of more than £6 million. The operation is now assumed to be extremely profitable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has said, all sorts of costs are lumped in to conceal the extent of the profitability of British citizenship work. These fees are wholly unjustified. It is especially wrong that people whose applications are refused should have to pay very substantial deposits. People whose applications are refused are not told why, nor do they have any right of appeal. In addition, their deposits are kept.

This is a grotesquely incompetent service. From the point of view of the customer, it is appalling in any terms. British citizenship is a right. Our constituents have a right to expect the Home Office to deliver an efficient, effective and speedy service. I hope very much that the next time the Minister comes to the House it will not be to increase the fees. I hope also that he will announce that some of the proposals of the Select Committee and of hon. Members speaking in this debate have been adopted.

11.23 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Like my hon. Friend, I am appalled by the very large increase in these fees. I am particularly disturbed at the way in which it is being implemented. It was announced in February that the increase was to be introduced on 1 March. We are on the threshold of April, yet the debate is only now taking place. Presumably, if the House were minded not to pass these regulations, there would have to be some complicated manoeuvring in the Home Office to repay money that has already been received as a result of the increase.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Madden) has said, the Home Office makes a considerable profit on the fees charged for nationality work—£6 million profit in previous years. Given the increase of about 25 per cent. in the basic registration charge and a higher increase for some other services, there is likely to be a considerable increase in profits in future years.

On top of that, deposits are kept for the three years during which the application is processed. If the application is then refused, the majority of the deposit is retained and, under the regulations, the proportion is to be

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

greatly increased to £60 on the full fee where the basic application costs £135 on grounds of marriage. At the end of those three years, no reasons are offered if the application is refused and no appeal is possible. The only course is to make a fresh application some years later. That smacks of Kafka. One has to pay for something in advance with no idea how long the process to get it will take; if it is refused, one cannot know why, and there is no appeal against the refusal. But as one would not know the reasons for the refusal anyway, it would be difficult to appeal against it.

The Minister should think again about the amount being charged, the appalling delays, and the language that he has used tonight. The idea that there is an underlying improvement in the trend of the way in which nationality fee applications are dealt with is extraordinary. For people in our constituencies, it does not add up to much to be told that the delay is still three years. As has been said, many people need their passports quickly—perhaps because they have jobs that require them to travel. There is some suggestion that employers are loth or extremely unhappy to employ or promote people who do not hold British passports because they know of the extraordinary delays that those poeple are likely to encounter while travelling through airports or any ports of entry anywhere in the EEC, never mind the rest of the world.

Mr. Vaz: Has my hon. Friend had any examples in his constituency, as I have had in mine, of constituents who, having made an application, have not received any acknowledgment from the Home Office that their case is being dealt with? People who applied in 1987 may have received a postcard reply, but no further communication from the Home Office. They therefore visit their Member of Parliament at his surgery to try to speed up the matter. Does my hon. Friend agree that the timetable should include a further acknowledgement to keep people informed about the stage that their application has reached, and informing them of how long the process will take? At the moment, they get no explanation until hon. Members write to the Minister and get a reply saying that it will take three years.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend has made a fair point. I hope that the Minister heard it and will take it on board. I have been approached by constituents who, having applied for British nationality and paid their fees, have not received any acknowledgement. The only way that they can tell whether the application has been processed is by examining their bank statement to find out whether the cheque has been cashed. That is very unsatisfactory.

When constituents approach me on such matters, I always tell them that the delay in dealing with applications is about three years. If there is some overwhelmingly pressing reason why they should have the passport more quickly, such as for travel, I take up the case and write to the Minister. I join my hon. Friends in paying the warmest tributes to the Minister's office and staff who are extremely helpful and co-operative and who reply to letters, doing their best to deal with the cases. I am in no sense being critical of them when I say that I want to see a better system rather than this system of cutting off the rough edges by having a good way of dealing with hon. Members' queries. I hope that the Minister understands that point.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is giving sensible advice to his constituents. The whole point of the bulletin that we shall be issuing shortly is that it will give information that will be generally helpful to applicants. It would not be sensible to transfer many staff into writing letters to people who have outstanding applications to tell them where their application is when they could be using that time to reduce the backlog still further.

Mr. Corbyn: Obviously any organisation with a serious backlog must decide how much staff time should be spent catching up and how much should be spent dealing with the people with problems. The Minister should appreciate that there is understandable concern if a cheque was cashed two or three years ago but the applicant has heard nothing. I do not wish to add to the problems, but, as the process is computerised, it is not that difficult to send a follow-up letter. I feel——

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Order [22 March], to put the Question:—*

The House divided: Ayes 21, Noes 192.

Division No. 107] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Mahon, Mrs Alice
Beckett, Margaret	Meale, Alan
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Nellist, Dave
Cohen, Harry	Skinner, Dennis
Cryer, Bob	Soley, Clive
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*	Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Graham, Thomas	Wise, Mrs Audrey
Haynes, Frank	
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*	**Mr. Keith Vaz. and**
Loyden, Eddie	**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.**
Madden, Max	

NOES

Alexander, Richard	Chope, Christopher
Amess, David	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Amos, Alan	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Arbuthnot, James	Colvin, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Ashby, David	Cope, Rt Hon John
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Couchman, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Cran, James
Baldry, Tony	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Bellingham, Henry	Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Bendall, Vivian	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Day, Stephen
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Devlin, Tim
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Boswell, Tim	Dover, Den
Bowis, John	Dykes, Hugh
Brazier, Julian	Fallon, Michael
Bright, Graham	Favell, Tony
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter	Fishburn, John Dudley
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Y's)*	Forman, Nigel
Buck, Sir Antony	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Burns, Simon	Forth, Eric
Burt, Alistair	Franks, Cecil
Butterfill, John	Freeman, Roger
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	French, Douglas
Carrington, Matthew	Gale, Roger
Cash, William	Gardiner, Sir George
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda	Gill, Christopher
Channon, Rt Hon Paul	Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Chapman, Sydney	Goodlad, Alastair

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Killeder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Porter, David *(Wavaney)*
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor, and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That Ann Widdecombe and Sir Richard Body be discharged from the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c. Bills and Mr. Spencer Batiste and Mr. Peter Temple-Morris be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

House of Commons Members' Fund

11.43 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons' Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions Etc. Act 1984, and section 7 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Perhaps it will be for the convenience of the House to discuss also the following motion:

That in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1991, as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £3,237 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,952 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £6,231 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £8,946 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,626 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £4,341 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,114 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £5,829 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,626 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,341 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,114 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,829 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,884 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £942 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

Mr. Morris: I propose the motions that appear on the Order Paper in my name and those of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who share with me the responsibility, as managing trustees, of administering the House of Commons Members' fund.

The purpose of the first motion is to provide for an increase in the present levels of grants and payments which may be made under the Members' fund legislation. These were last revised in April 1990 and the proposal I make now is that they should be increased, from 1 April 1991, by approximately 10·9 per cent. in line with the increases recently approved for public service and state retirement pensions which will take effect from April.

Those who stand to benefit under the proposal are former colleagues who left the House before September 1964, and their surviving spouses. Unlike those of us serving in the House now, they do not qualify for a pension in respect of parliamentary service as of right.

Many of this fast-dwindling number are now in their nineties, often living in straitened circumstances, and have to cope with all the difficulties that come with advancing years. The modest extra financial help which this motion seeks to provide will, I am sure, ease some of their problems and be gratefully received.

I make no apology for once again asking right hon. and hon. Members to help the managing trustees trace any former Members, or dependants of former Members who have died, who may be in need of help from the fund. In 1990, with the help of parliamentary colleagues, we were able to make contact with, and give help to, nine former Members and dependants. Over Easter in their constituencies, I hope that it may be possible for Members of Parliament who have reason to believe that their predecessors could be helped by the fund, to establish their whereabouts and let us know the former Member's name and address. The cause is worth while, and I shall much appreciate the help any present Member can give in bringing former Members into contact with the fund.

The provisions for which I now seek approval are set out in detail in the motions on the Order Paper and may be briefly summarised. Sub-paragraph (a) deals with grants to ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £3,237 subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £5,952. In the case of ex-Members with longer service and in need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £6,231 subject to an income limit of £8,946.

Sub-paragraphs (b) and (c) deal with the provision for grants to widows and widowers of ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £1,626 subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £4,341. Similarly, in the case of widows and widowers of ex-Members who had longer service, and where there is need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £3,114 subject to an income limit of £5,829 per annum.

Sub-paragraph (d) refers to "as of right" payments from the Members' fund to ex-Members who had 10 years' service before October 1964, and to widows and widowers of such Members, as provided for by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981. It is proposed to increase these annual payments

to £1,884 in the case of ex-Members and £942 in the case of widows and widowers. The additional annual cost of these increases is estimated to amount to £10,788.

The other resolution relates to section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 7 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, which now authorises the trustees of the Members' fund to make

"such periodical or other payments . . . as they think fit"

to ex-Members, or their widows, widowers, or children of ex-Members,

"having regard to the circumstances of the persons to or in respect of whom the payments are to be made."

Section 4 of the 1948 Act, together with Section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended, provide that in any year, for the purpose of making such payments, the House of Commons may by resolution direct that the whole or any part of the amount contributed by Members, together with up to £22,000 of the Treasury's contribution in the year, can be appropriated. The total which may be appropriated at present under this provision is £37,600. However, in his speech on Second Reading of this year's Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act on 31 January 1991, the Lord President gave in column 1149 a specific undertaking to make an additional £100,000 available to meet the costs of further discretionary awards to be made under Section 4.

At present, nine beneficiaries receive payments totalling £21,216 per annum under this section, and the monies to be appropriated are needed to continue these payments and to fund further cases which will arise.

I am sure that the motions will have the support of all right hon. and hon. Members, and I commend them to the House. In doing so, and as in previous years, I should like again most warmly to thank Jim Dobson, Tony Lewis, Mike Barram, Pam Hurford and their colleagues in the Fees Office for all the care with which they assist beneficiaries of the fund. I am told frequently how much their work is appreciated by those whom the fund exists to help and, as chairman of the trustees, I see at first hand the commitment and concern with which they work, day by day, in the service of our former colleagues, their widows and other dependants. They deserve the gratitude of the whole House.

11.52 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I should like to convey the appreciation of the House to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the others on the fund committee for their meticulous work on behalf of Members and ex-Members and their widows. Having been responsible for looking after the estates of a number of ex-Opposition Members after their death and considering the possibilities of pensions and other funding arrangements, I find it of great concern that, over the years, the House has not been giving widows, in particular, the benefits that they should have received. I should like to ask my right hon. Friend the number of recipients, as of right, under the motion.

I share my right hon. Friend's gratitude to Jim Dobson and the Fees Office staff for their work, but I am concerned that there is difficulty in contacting ex-Members or even the widows of ex-Members. Surely, if we were paying into a pension fund or any other fund outside the House of Commons and we left employment, our employers and the people to whom we contribute our pension fund would be able to determine where we lived and how they could give us the benefit.

It is not incumbent on Members to find out whether their predecessors or their widows are alive. It is the responsibility of the House to keep detailed information on the people who have served it in the past. I am positive that my right hon. Friend will consider this, so that he will be able to persuade his committee to ensure that, in future, the House has a proper record of those who have served the House, their addresses and their whereabouts if they move, so that the fund can be extended to them.

I welcome the extension and the increase in the benefits. That is long overdue. Perhaps the House could consider even more and better funding for the people concerned, particularly the widows of Members. This is a step towards giving them a reasonable income, but it is far less than Members' widows should expect after 20 or 25 years' service to the House. Members are away from their wives five days' a week and only home at weekends. That can go on for up to 25 years, and if they die their spouses deserve every consideration. It is high time the House considered that. I ask my right hon. Friend again to give the number who would receive benefits as of right.

11.56 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I have the privilege of addressing the House on the subject of funds for those who have served in this place and for widows, too, who were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

We tend to concentrate far too much on affairs of state and to forget the important things that are buried underneath, such as the rights of Members of Parliament and their widows. My hon. Friend talked about man and wife, and some are lucky enough to be in this place together. It is not always a question of one being way up in the north and the other way down here in the south. The married couples who serve in this place are lucky people. Most Members who do not live in the south are separated from their spouses. It is important to ensure, not only tonight but in the future, that we deal properly with such matters.

I have a great friend back in Mansfield who is aged 95. He came into this House in 1941 and in 1966 he went to the other place. He is still a Member of the other place. But at the moment he is very poorly and he has been in hospital for a number of weeks. He benefited from the fund and it is important that he should. Many of our colleagues who have now passed on benefited from it when we did not have a proper pension fund. It helped people who had served this place for many years. Without such a fund, they would have received nothing.

It is important that we should think about that continuously and at the same time consider what we should do in the future. There is always argument about the amount of money available. At the moment, we are talking about our own parliamentary pension fund which has gone before the review board. That fund is alive with money and we should be making good use of it. The widows have had a raw deal for many years and it is our responsibility, not the Government's, to decide what should happen. That is what we should be doing. We should remember that.

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

As I said at the beginning, affairs of state appear to hide that kind of thing. We should look at the matter carefully and do the right thing. That is not only in the interests of the widows; it is in our interests as well.

We pay into a pension fund to enjoy a decent pension when we retire. One can pay into a private pension outside, pay less and get more when one retires. It is scandalous. Therefore, we ought to study this matter properly.

I am leaving the House at the next election, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be leaving with me. We will enjoy a pension of sorts when we finish, but I hope that future Members of Parliament will benefit from the discussions that we are having in the House with a view to improving pension entitlements so that they are looked after properly when they leave. It is important that we should keep our eye on the matter and not forget it.

Finally, I must mention the wonderful staff in the Fees Office—they have been mentioned twice tonight. I do not want to mention any name in particular, but I know that, as regards the Fees Office, there is one important person in the Chamber at the moment. However, across yonder it is teamwork in our interests. One can go to the Fees Office at any time and they will help with any problem. As regards the fund, we must not forget that we are totally reliant upon them to do the job properly and they do it. They do a first-class job, and we must recognise that too.

In the final analysis, the guidance that the Fees Office get is dependent upon the trustees doing their job and representing Members of Parliament properly in this place as regards grants or pensions. However, we must remember that if the Fees Office staff do not have the resources in their hands they cannot do the job properly, or in the way that we would like them to do it. The proper resources should be there so that the trustees can do their job.

The trustees have done a first-class job and I thank them for it and ask them to continue. Let the wonderful people in the Fees Office get on with it on our behalf.

12.2 am

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am always pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). I endorse all that he has said, and all that the hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has said, about the skill, dedication, commitment and service of those people in the Fees Office, who do a wonderful job, not only for us as Members of Parliament, but in administering the pension and other funds on behalf of previous Members, their spouses, widows, widowers and other dependants.

I hope that you will permit me to pick up on one matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the way in which the House treats those people who are no longer here, who have retired or, sadly, have lost their seats. I have longed to say this, because I have spoken many times to the hon. Member for Wythenshawe, who shares my view, I think, but as a trustee is limited in what he can do.

I believe that the House deals in a miserly way with those who have served in this place, have committed themselves to it for many years, and have either retired or lost their seats.

The hon. Member for Ashfield, when speaking to those two motions, said that the pension fund was awash with money. He did not go on to say that, as a result, the Government—that is, the Treasury—were seeking to reduce its contribution to the Members' fund, which is quite wrong and quite immoral. Those people who administer the fund, and the Government, acting on behalf of this place in making certain resources available, should deal more generously with Members who lose their seats or retire.

People who are living in very straitened circumstances —some in almost abject poverty—have been mentioned many times. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) said, it is sad that we have to seek to trace such people. We should know where they are and be able to help them. Given our modern information technology and communications systems, it is disgraceful that we should have to appeal to Members of Parliament to try to ensure that those who have given service to the House and the country can lead slightly more comfortable lives in their retirement. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has already made that point.

I, too, pay tribute to the trustees. They do an excellent job, committing themselves for many hours to serving the House, past Members and their dependants. Without adequate resources, they cannot do the job that the House and the country expect for those who have served here. I warmly support the motions moved so succinctly by the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe, and I commend him for what he and his fellow trustees do.

I hope that, although few people are present at this late hour, the message will reach the Treasury: "Don't you dare reduce the resources." They should be maintained; perhaps, indeed, they should be increased—as the hon. Member for Ashfield suggested—to enable us to provide reasonable pensions and other benefits, in a responsible manner, for those who have served here, and for their dependants when they have passed on. Otherwise, the House will not be doing itself a service, let alone those who have served it so well.

12.6 am

Mr. Alfred Morris: I very much appreciate the kind words of my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) about the work of the trustees. I know that my fellow trustees, on both sides of the House, will be grateful, too, for what they have said tonight.

I am extremely glad also that my own tribute to the staff of the Fees Office, who sustain our efforts as trustees, has been so strongly endorsed by everyone who has contributed to the debate. My hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore and for Ashfield spoke with all their customary and robust common sense. They were concerned about the financial circumstances of widows of former Members and I know their concern reflects anxiety felt by Members of all parties.

The widows of the former Members of Parliament with whom we are dealing tonight are among the least fortunate of all widows whose husbands have served the House of Commons. They are the widows of Members who served here before the inception of the parliamentary contributory pension fund. The increases that I propose are modest, but are much needed by widows, many of whom are over 90 and live in straitened circumstances.

I must not stray tonight into the affairs of the fund in response to what has been said about the pensions payable to the widows of Members of Parliament in the current scheme. It is well known, however, that the managing trusteess of the PCPF have made clear to both the House and the Top Salaries Review Body our strong feeling that Members' widows should have a two-thirds pension. I hope that the pressure we have tried to exert will soon bear fruit. As the House knows, I am also chairman of the managing trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund.

I was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore about as-of-right payments. They are made from the Members' fund to ex-Members who had 10 years' service before October 1964 and to widows and widowers of such Members, as provided for by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981. As of now, 38 ex-Members are recipients of as-of-right payments and 42 widows. The total therefore is 80. I hope that this answers my hon. Friend's point.

My hon. Friend and others have made a number of suggestions that are carefully noted. I shall look in particular at what has been said about keeping in touch with former Members. We are talking here in many cases about people who left the House more than 40 years ago. Information technology, about which the hon. Member for Macclesfield knows a great deal, was quite different then from what it is today.

I hope that Members will help us, wherever they can, to fill the gaps in our information. We need to know of more of our ex-colleagues who can benefit from the House of Commons Members' fund. If any hon. Member who is here tonight, or anyone reading the report of this debate, can put us in touch with anyone we can help, as managing trustees of the fund, we shall be only too delighted. We all pay, as Members of Parliament, into the fund. All of us want to make absolutely certain that the help that it can provide is provided to those who are most in need.

Again, I thank my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Macclesfield for their valuable contributions to the debate. All the points they made will be very carefully considered by the managing trustees.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons' Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions Etc. Act 1984, and section 7 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

Resolved,

That in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1991, as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £3,237 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,952 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £6,231 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £8,946 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virture of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,626 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £4,341 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,114 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £5,829 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,626 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,341 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,114 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,829 per annum, whichever is the less:'.

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,884 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £942 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

PETITION

Crown Post Office (Maesteg)

12.12 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I wish to present a petition from my constituents residing in Maesteg in the Ogmore constituency and in the borough of Ogwr expressing great dismay and concern that the Crown post office at Maesteg, serving a population of some 25,000, should be downgraded to that of an agency office without any guaranteee that the provision of the present services will remain available and that the staff employed will enjoy the present nationally agreed pay and conditions of work. The 5,000 signatories also clearly state that this will not be in the long-term interests of the people of Maesteg.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge Right Honourable Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to intervene in the proposal to downgrade the Maesteg Crown post office to an agency office.

And your petitioners will, as in duty bound, ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Timeshare Promotion Schemes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

12.13 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I very much hope that the subject that I shall draw to the House's attention this evening will be of general interest. It raises certain principles upon which we may wish to reflect. Having discussed the subject with colleagues, I believe that there are few hon. Members who have not yet received an envelope from America suggesting that detail of good news are to follow. I will give some details of the good news shortly.I recognise that business is very tough for many people. Competition within various sectors is extremely keen and advertising has an important role to play, but I deplore the explosion of junk mail dropping on to our mats, the clear objective of which is to encourage individuals to participate in timeshare promotion schemes.

The whole question was drawn to my attention by the good endeavours of a number of constituents, who complained about the volume of unsolicited mail and their disappointment at later not receiving the prizes to which they believed that they were entitled when they opened the envelopes.

When I and my good wife received letters from America a few weeks ago, we opened them and were greeted with the glad tidings that we had both won cars. The company which sent us the news is a marketing organisation based in Sheffield. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name it".] When we opened the envelopes, we were told that we were gold star winners and that we had both won cars. Naturally we were excited. During our animated conversation, my wife decided that she would have a white car and I decided to choose a blue car.

After making a telephone call and determining that the good news was indeed correct, I thought that I would be cautious and put pen to paper. I received an interesting reply from the marketing company. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name it."] I am under pressure from my hon. Friends to name the company.

I quote from the letter:

"I was very surprised to learn that you went as far as discussing what colour Ford Fiesta you would choose and how excited your household were that morning. I did, however, detect a certain tongue in cheek tone, and if you were truly under the impression that you had both won a Ford Fiesta, which I seriously doubt, I should like to bring your attention to two main points of the letter. Firstly, the opening line begins, 'If you bring the number', and secondly, in the sentence below the first box section it clearly indicates that this is purely an illustration.

Your request finally to take advantage of my offer of contacting Mr. Nokes and Mr. Aspindle is purely a figure of speech, but if the purpose of contacting them is to verify whether or not they were genuinely awarded motor cars, I can assure you that written and photographic evidence has been submitted to the Office of Fair Trading and Advertising Standards Authority. I am sure that, put in their position, you would not want to be hounded by countless calls from doubting members of the public as to the authenticity of the claims."

What a lot of codswallop, dishonest in the extreme. Judging by the letter, the company is not even ashamed of its activities. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name it."] Responding to the pressure of my hon. Friends, I have substantial documentary evidence of the veracity of what I have said.

I and my wife then attended another presentation to which we had been invited, at fairly seedy premises in Leicester square. After being served tea in plastic containers we were, as it were, counselled. Once our credentials were established, we watched a film of nauseating crassness about the wonders of timeshare. We were then assigned a South African gentleman. He assumed that our appetites had been whetted and it was clear that he hoped that he would be able to make a sale. He inquired my occupation. When I told him that I was a Member of this good House, he turned somewhat pale, or paler than I look now. Putting it mildly, he could not wait to get shot of me. We were then ushered to the door, where we were presented with our card. Those at the door went through the procedure of checking our lucky number with the card whereby I would collect my car or whatever.

It will come as a great surprise to the House when I say that I did not win a car, nor did I win a motor scooter or money. Instead, I was presented with a plastic alarm clock and a delightfully and exotically described Queen Anne entertaining set. The entertaining set would not entertain one person, let alone a gathering of guests.

I have recently received more invitations. The House will be interested to know that one of them was from the same company in Sheffield, which clearly had not crossed me off its mailing list. The company tells me that I am again a gold card winner and that I am guaranteed to win either a Volvo sport, a sport boat with outboard motor or £2,000 in cash. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that I have made an arrangement to attend the presentation in a fortnight's time. That is why I am resisting pressure to name the company.

I have also received a letter from a trading company based in Bradford, in which I am told that I am a gold card winner. I am told also—I am indeed lucky—that I have won a 1991 Ford Escort 1·6 Ghia or a Bahamas cruise, or a £1,000 cash prize. I shall be attending that company's presentation in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) in about a fortnight's time.

Finally, I have received a card from Dallas, Texas. It tells me that I am yet again a gold card winner, not a silver or bronze winner. It seems that I shall receive either a Ford Fiesta or an Electra sport boat. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) were still in his place, I am sure that he would be able to accommodate me with some water on which to enjoy the pleasures of a motor boat. I am in something of a dilemma when it comes to establishing where I shall be able to cruise with my wife and, on reflection, I have not made an appointment with that company: I do not wish to be greedy and I wish some prizes to be in reserve for future winners.

I know that the two organisations with which I have made appointments will be delighted by the news that I am able to give the House tonight, which is that I shall be attending both presentations complete with a camera crew. I know that the crew will wish to film me as I drive down the motorway in my new car and as my wife sails down the Thames in our new sport boat. The presentation will be completed, of course, by pigs flying.

I have two secretaries who job-share, one of whom has recently related her good fortune. She received a letter from one of the timeshare companies, in which she was told that she had won a 22-inch colour televison or £2,000, or an attractive luggage set, a car or a camera. She was told in the letter that she and her husband—she is married to

one of the constables who serves in the House—could collect a fabulous prize merely by attending the timeshare presentation.

There was no mention at the outset of having to spend two hours listening to one of the presentations in Kensington. As soon as they arrived at the company's building a form was shoved into their hand and they were asked what sort of holiday they would prefer. They were then ushered into a small room with a few other people and left to watch a film with a famous person talking about how fantastic timeshare villas were. As soon as that finished, they were taken to sit at a table with a salesman who tried extremely hard to sell them a timeshare scheme. He got very impatient when he learned that they were not interested. It was hard sell at its worst.

When he realised that he was not going to sell anything, he got up and left. My secretary and her husband called him back and asked about the prize. He said that the number on the letter referred to numbers on small lockers on the wall. On closer examination, none of the lockers had a number. However, he opened one and said, "Oh yes, you have won a camera." He turned to a box on the floor that was full of cheap and nasty cameras that would be described as mickey mouse.

Only this morning my other secretary received some good news. She has won a Caribbean cruise, a Florida dream holiday, £1,000 cash, seven days for two in the mystical east, a Ford Escort or a holiday in New York.

Since the subject for this Adjournment debate was announced, it has attracted a fair amount of media interest. I pay a warm tribute to a Conservative Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Edward McMillan-Scott. He is the MEP for York and the Conservative spokesman on tourism and transport. Some years ago, he began a campaign against fraud and malpractice in the holiday homes market. None of my remarks is directed specifically against the timeshare concept. For many people, it is an attractive option, but I object to the hard-sell technique being employed to get people to the presentations.

As the House will know, timeshare means the right to use a flat or apartment usually for one or two weeks at the same time each year. Timeshare operates largely independently of laws, as the companies are owned through offshore trustee companies. I am advised that there is a high rate of bankruptcy among the companies and the knock-on effects are worrying for some of our constituents who enter into such agreements.

The concept of timeshare started back in 1974; but following scandals and bankruptcies in the United States of America, marketing companies moved to Iberia. Further to Mr. McMillan-Scott's amendment to the 1989 Garcia Amigo report on timeshare for the European Parliament, the Commission has introduced a mandatory seven-day cooling-off period in its draft unfair contract terms directive. I am glad to tell the House that that becomes effective on 3 April.

Mr. McMillan-Scott's advice to our constituents is well stated. He says that one should never take credit cards to a timeshare presentation, always ask to see copies of club constitutions and deeds of trust, and never be tempted, if one already has a timeshare, by offers to upgrade to a new development on promises that one's own will be easily sold, as that is seldom the reality.

People are advised never to pay more than £2,500 for a high-season week in Southern Spain, and never to forget that 30 per cent. of the whole cost of these timeshare schemes goes in commission to the salesmen engaged in presentations.

The Consumers Association contacted me today. It, too, is expressing concern about the aggressive and misleading marketing campaigns, the lack of cooling-off periods, spiralling maintenance costs, and problems with resale. The association has welcomed the report of the Director-General of Fair Trading, which was published last July, and supported its recommendations. However, it would like to see all contracts signed by United Kingdom residents made subject to the jurisdication of English courts. It certainly welcomed the Government's response to the report in February, with its proposal for amendment of the Trade Descriptions Act to cover award schemes and misstatements about services and accommodation facilities.

The International Property Owners Organisation has also made strong representations to me about the offshore trust that is to be set up by founder members of clubs. As the club is not the beneficial owner of the property, the trustees in most cases act as custodians of documents, and not within the provisions of acceptance of the word "trust" as recognised by most citizens.

The power of attorney is usually held by the man with the money, and is used to sell or mortgage the property. The organisation constantly receives distressing complaints, resulting directly from the marketing techniques of the very companies that I have described and it is clear that often inadequate counselling is given when crucially important decisions are being made about the investment of our constituents' hard earned money.

I hope that the Minister, in the short time that I have selfishly left to him, will be able to say something about why these letters originate in the United States of America, what is the likelihood of getting effective legislation to stop all this nonsense in the first place, and what is the likelihood that in two weeks' time my wife and I will become the proud winners of a new car, a new motor boat or a holiday abroad.

12.32 am

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I am mindful of the hour, but I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on raising the most important subject of timeshare. I echo my hon. Friend's praise of the hard work of the European Parliament Member for York, Mr. Edward McMillan-Scott, who has taken the matter up and put it on the books in Europe.

I hope that the Minister will say to what extent there will be safeguards for the British public, particularly in respect of the people to whom they should address their complaints. Is it recommended that complaints should go to the trading standards officers? A great many complaints are being received, and it is important that confidence should be restored. We do not want to see further auctions —perhaps the saddest auctions of all, involving those who have to sell their timeshare rights.

12.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am happy to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) in praise of Edward McMillan-Scott, the MEP for York. As so many timeshare deals are

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

located abroad, there is a large degree of competence for the European Community, and we shall urge the Community to act.

I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on drawing the attention of the House to the abuses that undoubtedly take place in the sale of timeshare properties, and on doing so in such a lively and entertaining manner. The way in which he described his own experience in a seedy establishment in Leicester square, where, instead of receiving the hoped-for Fiesta, he ended up with a plastic alarm clock, gripped the House.

Although I believe that those tactics are adopted by only a minority of companies, I fully share my hon. Friend's distaste for them and deplore both the deception involved in luring people to timeshare presentations by the offer of attractive-sounding gifts and the high-pressure sales tactics to which they are all too often subjected when they get there.

As my hon. Friends will be aware, we were sufficiently concerned by this problem to ask the Director General of Fair Trading to carry out a full review of the problems associated with timeshare. This he did, and his very full and thorough report was published in July of last year. As the report makes clear, it is necessary to keep the problem in perspective.

As I am sure my hon. Friends will accept, there is nothing wrong with timeshare as a concept. There are believed to be more than 200,000 timeshare owners in the United Kingdom, and available evidence suggests that most are perfectly happy with what they have bought. I would not want anyone to be discouraged from buying a timeshare from a reputable company by the dishonest sales methods of a few. Yet, as my hon. Friend has so eloquently made clear, those sales methods create a real problem. Indignant letters from people who have received letters from timeshare companies telling them that they have received an attractive-sounding award form the biggest single item in my mailbag as Minister responsible for consumer affairs. I have yet to receive letters from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon, but he has made his point far more effectively in this forum, and we in the Department are grateful to him.

Although it is true that, as my hon. Friend said, award schemes of free gifts do not fall within the present scope of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, purchasers of timeshare properties will, so far as United Kingdom law applies, enjoy the protection of the normal law of contract and of existing consumer protection legislation. The Trade Descriptions Act may not apply to award schemes, but it applies to other aspects of the sale of timeshare, and sellers of timeshare are also subject to the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations. So a purchaser or prospective purchaser has a remedy at law against deliberate deception or misrepresentation.

He has a remedy, too, if he finds that he has contracted to buy a property which does not correspond to the description given to him when he signed the contract. The Director General of Fair Trading has already invited and received from one timeshare company an undertaking that it would not publish further misleading advertisements. I am not sure whether that was the timeshare company about which my hon. Friend talked, but could not name for the present.

I emphasise these points, because the impression is sometimes given that the timeshare purchaser is always a helpless victim. This is by no means necessarily so. There is, however, one important qualification that I should make, and to which I shall return. I said that purchasers of timeshare properties would enjoy the protection of the normal law of contract and of existing consumer protection legislation so far as United Kingdom law applies. In many cases, it will not. A contract may be with a foreign developer or it may well be entered into abroad. This point is of particular concern to the European Community, and we shall raise it with the EC following the campaign that was started by Edward McMillan-Scott. Most timeshares are located abroad. United Kingdom legislation may be able to deal with sales abuses in the United Kingdom, but this is not enough to provide complete protection for United Kingdom timeshare owners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon called for changes in the law to put a stop to these schemes, and it may help if I enlarge a little on this aspect. First, I do not think that it is the place of the law to put a stop to this or any other method of selling, provided it is conducted honestly and without misrepresentation. I am sure that my hon. Friend, who is also a believer in the traditional free market, will agree with that.

I quite take my hon. Friend's point that timeshare promotion schemes have sometimes been very far from honest. He gave some vivid examples. But it should in fairness be said that the schemes vary widely in their approach. Some make it clear that the addressee will be required to sit through a timeshare presentation in order to qualify for his or her gift, and it may be made clear too, that the gifts are not without strings. For example, if one has won a holiday in Florida, one will have to pay for the air fares. In that case, the schemes, although perhaps somewhat distasteful, are not something which, in a free society, we ought to be trying to ban. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree. Other schemes are much less honest, and here I agree with my hon. Friend that the law needs to be strengthened—and we will strengthen it.

To a certain extent, the law already offers some control. Timeshare award schemes are subject, like any other commercial activity, to the law of misrepresentation and also to the regulations against misleading advertising. As I mentioned, the latter have been used successfully against one promoter, but there are undoubtedly gaps in the law. First and most obviously, there is the fact that the Trade Descriptions Act does not apply to award schemes of the type with which my hon. Friend dealt. We intend to remedy that gap as part of our general review of the Act which is now in progress. I hope that that will satisfy my hon. Friend.

So far, so good. My hon. Friend described the nuisance and deception involved in some award schemes, and we propose to act to prevent that. Perhaps it is worth my stressing once again that it is not award schemes as such that are objectionable—they are a legitimate, although not to my mind attractive, way of selling. What is objectionable is when they deliberately set out to deceive, either by making the recipient think that he has won

something that he has not or by disguising the fact that the recipient will be required to sit through a possibly lengthy sales pitch before the award can be claimed.

The problem does not end there. People who attend these presentations are often subjected to perhaps several hours of heavy and persistent salesmanship—I am not sure whether that happened to my hon. Friend—for which they may be psychologically and even physically unprepared, unlike my hon. Friend. It is not easy to imagine the effect that those presentations may have on normally robust and intelligent people. I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to act and that the law should address award schemes.

Unfortunately, I have so little time in which to speak that I cannot spend as much time as I should have liked dealing with how we propose to act at European level. I shall approach my counterpart in the European Commission and ask him to institute the suggestions of the Director General of Fair Trading, especially the proposal for a cooling-off period. That is important. Most of the difficulties with timeshare arise because people are pressured into making an instant decision which they later regret.

More work must be done to ensure that there is a proper prospectus. Often a person hears about a vague concept of buying a place in the sun for his retirement, but there are few details about what he will get for the money that he hands over, often because of a high-pressure sale.

Although there is a certain amount that we can do, we must rely on the good sense of the people who go to presentations. Legislation and effective regulation by the industry can help them, but consumers must be prepared to look after themselves. They must be prepared to think about what they are offered.

My hon. Friend will go to the timeshare presentation in a week. If he does not want to buy, he should get up and leave. If, at the end of the presentation, he is pressed to sign a contract on the spot, he should refuse. If he is offered apparent benefits from signing on the spot, he should refuse. If he is interested but in doubt about what is on offer, he should ask for a prospectus and time to study it at leisure. But the House and I know that my hon. Friend's good sense is such that he will not walk away from such presentations without thinking carefully about what is on offer.

Mr. Speaker: I am now required to suspend the sitting until a message has been received from another place. The bells will be rung shortly before the sitting resumes.

12.43 am

Sitting suspended—

1.36 am

On resuming—

Mr. Speaker: A message has been received from another place as follows:

The Lords have agreed to the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, without amendment.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 28 March 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TAY ROAD BRIDGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

MR. SPEAKER (ABSENCE)

Ordered,

That Mr. Speaker have leave of absence on Friday 19th April to attend the enthronement of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

PETITION

Education (Warwickshire)

9.34 am

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I beg to present a petition from the residents in the Leamington Spa and Warwick area. The petition expresses concern about possible reductions in education for the under-5s if Warwickshire county council is charge-capped. The petition is signed by more than 150 people, and I well understand their anxiety. I hope that it will be noted by Ministers in the Department of the Environment.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble petition of the Residents of Warwickshire, showeth that Warwickshire's Educational Provision will be very seriously damaged if current budget levels of £278·3 million are not maintained and we believe that if this level is cut by Community Charge Capping, then Warwickshire Educational provision will be in an intolerable situation. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to reconsider the standard spending assesment for Warwickshire in order to enable Warwickshire to provide a just and fair resourcing in education.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

Middle East

9.36 am

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I greatly appreciate this opportunity to refer to the situation in the middle east following the successful outcome of the Gulf war. Although the House has held several debates about the winning of that war, curiously there has been no debate until now on winning the peace. Therefore, I intend to discuss several of the issues that must be addressed if we are to resolve the outstanding problems which have caused so much tension, conflict and persecution in the area and which have produced such large numbers of refugees.

I have no doubt that history will judge Saddam Hussein as having done the world a service by taking it by complete surprise by invading Kuwait so ruthlessly last summer. In doing so, he dispelled any complacency that had been encouraged by the remarkable events in central and eastern Europe, which led to the end of the cold war and to a new order which heralded peace and security and encouraged democracies in countries as far away as Nicaragua, Namibia and Nepal.

On 2 August last year, Saddam Hussein demonstrated that human nature does not change and that there would always be a need for collective security and for the international rule of law to deal with the aggression and atrocities of dictatorships such as his. Thanks to him and to the remarkable coalition of more than 30 countries which sent forces to the Gulf, the world today is a more realistic place and the authority of the United Nations has been considerably enhanced. That represents a great tribute to the initial response of President Bush and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Thatcher). Now all of us, as member states of the United Nations, have a responsibility to learn the lessons of that experience and to avoid its repetition.

It is encouraging to see our world leaders calmly sharing ideas about how that can be done without rushing into, for example, an ill-prepared international conference or European Community initiative. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the bilateral meetings that they have undertaken thus far and also to the United States Secretary of State James Baker for his untiring work.

I do not want to dwell on the current situation in Iraq since it would not be right for us to dictate who governs that country. That is a matter for its own people, although we would all like to see a pro-democracy movement emerge from the civil war. Nevertheless, no one who has seen on television the destruction of the Kuwaiti oil wells and the terrible atrocities that Saddam Hussein perpetrated on the Kuwaiti people will want his crimes to be forgotten or ignored. I understand that we regard those war crimes as, in the first instance, a matter for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to pursue. However, I shall look forward to learning from my hon. Friend the Minister how we anticipate that Saddam Hussein will be held accountable for his crimes.

Obviously we welcome the Kuwaiti Government's intention to introduce a democratic process once their people have been able to resume a more normal existence and the economy and infrastructure have been repaired. Current reports of the persecution of Kuwait's remaining

[Mr. David Atkinson]

Palestinian population must, however, be of concern to us. Whatever new arrangements the Kuwaiti Government might want to make for the future employment of foreigners, there can be no justification for the kind of violent treatment and discrimination that we have read about. Any evidence of Palestinian collaboration or treachery during the Iraqi occupation must await the consideration of an independent judiciary, which will certainly be one hallmark of Kuwait's new democracy.

I want to refer to the larger, long-standing issues of the middle east. The first is the continuing plight of the British hostages. John McCarthy will begin his sixth year of captivity on 17 April, Terry Waite is now in his fifth year of captivity, Jackie Mann will soon commence his third year of captivity, and Roger Cooper remains imprisoned in Tehran. Following the war, surely there now exists a degree of good will between our allies, including Syria, a degree of relief, and perhaps appreciation on the part of Iran, now that Saddam Hussein has been so resoundingly beaten, and even some realism on the part of the Hezbollah in Lebanon that life will never be the same again in the middle east. Surely we can appeal to those new feelings when presssing for the immediate release of those hostages. I look forward to learning from my hon. Friend what new initiatives the Government intend to take in that respect.

The situation in Lebanon must now be resolved. After nearly two decades of civil war and internal terrorism, of invasion and occupation by two foreign powers—Israel and Syria—and armed interventions by the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the United States, its people can surely expect a settlement that will restore Lebanon's sovereignty. Surely they can expect a settlement that re-establishes Lebanon's representative Government and that delicate balance between Christian and Muslim which once enabled that country to be the most prosperous in the middle east. The prerequisite for that is, of course, the complete withdrawl of all Syrian and Israeli forces of occupation. I accept that that is unlikely to be achieved without international inspiration—one could say, without divine inspiration.

International appreciation will certainly need to be applied to the Kurdish issue, which can no longer be ignored. One should recall that the true evil of Saddam Hussein first came to the world's attention through the testimonies of those Iraqi Kurds who survived his chemical weapons by seeking refuge in Turkey.

I appreciate that the demands of self-determination for the Iraqi Kurds will be referred to in much greater detail in the following debate, but this debate would be incomplete without noting the undeniable fact of history that an independent Kurdistan was mentioned by the great powers as part of the break-up of the Ottoman empire in the 1919 treaty of Versailles and was promised under the 1920 treaty of Sevres. That promise was quickly abandoned as a result of the creation of the republic of Turkey in 1923.

Who then can blame the Kurds for their many attempts to seek autonomy, including by armed insurrection, especially where they are strongest in Iraq? Some of those insurrections have resulted in short-lived concessions, but most have resulted in the most appalling brutalities, culminating in the use of poison gas at Halabja in 1988, which killed 5,000 Kurds. It must also be said that some Kurds have resorted to terrorism, most notably the PKK in Turkey. That group's attempts to draw attention to their demands are unacceptable given the unprecedented autonomy that the Kurds enjoy in Turkey.

The reported success of the Kurds in northern Iraq against the forces of Saddam Hussein suggests that they may yet succeed in achieving a Kurdish entity within a more democratic and federated Iraq. That will only serve to encourage the Kurdish people in the other four countries in which they live to seek the same. It is obvious that there will be a Kurdish problem for as long as their demands for self-determination are ignored and denied. That matter must now be on the agenda for resolution.

It must be clear to all that the central cause of continuing instability, tension and conflict in the middle east is the Arab-Israeli dispute. From the day that the United Nations recognised the Jewish state of Israel in 1948, there have been four devastating wars, as well as a series of interventions in Lebanon. The dispute has been responsible for the current figure of 2,420,000 stateless, homeless Palestinian refugees who are registered with the United Nations, which supplies relief services through the United Nations Relief Works Agency.

Just as any resolution of that conflict must end the protracted state of war to enable Israel to enjoy a right of existence within recognised and secure borders—as provided for in UN resolution 242—it is equally clear that there must be a just and permanent settlement for the Palestinians which will enable them to choose permanent accommodation within the realities of the present situation. Only a democratic process towards self-determination and self-governance on the west bank and the Gaza strip will make the work of UNRWA unecessary.

Despite more than four decades of hostility, the problem is not intractable: the Camp David accords, which brought peace with Egypt, should remind us of that. Therefore, it must be helpful to urge Israel's Arab neighbours to end their state of war with Israel and to recognise it and its right to exist.

The gulf between Israel and the PLO is not as great as I thought. I was encouraged to discover that in my discussions with Israeli Ministers and Palestinians during my visit to the region in November to prepare a report for the Council of Europe—a follow-up to the one that I reported to the House in July 1988.

The Shamir peace plan of 1989 and the Palestine National Council declaration of 1988 recognised the rights of the other—in the case of the PLO, for the first time. They represent a foundation upon which both parties are prepared to negotiate.

The disappointment today is that Israel, which has always opposed an international conference to resolve its dispute with its Arab neighbours—understandably, in my view—is failing to take initiatives to introduce its own democratic values to its occupied territories, values upon which a process of reconciliation confidence, security and co-operation can be built. Nor does it appear seriously to b seeking those bilateral negotiations with its neighbours which it maintains is the only way forward, as it was with Egypt. Instead, it continues to stall on its own peace process. It is alienating still further its Arab population by continued Palestinian deportations, further Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and by encouraging a climate in which the basic human rights of the Palestinians are seen to be violated.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I am sure that my hon. Friend wishes to continue to paint a balanced picture. Will he confirm that Israeli Ministers have said on many occasions that they are prepared to negotiate with any Arab state? Indeed, as is well known, feelers have been extended for some time to Syria. Will he further confirm, on the Palestinian issue, that one of the major problems, which he has not yet mentioned but perhaps will, is that the PLO supported Saddam Hussein in the recent conflict?

Mr. Atkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making those points, to which I was about to come.

Lest it be thought from the critical comments—I accept that they have been critical—that I have made about Israel that I am no longer a Conservative Friend of Israel, let me say that one of the most enduring influences in my life was my experience of working on a kibbutz within range of Syrian guns from the Golan heights. I assure my hon. Friend that I am wholly committed to Israel's right to exist as a Jewish homeland within secure borders. But I also recognise, as surely do most Israelis, that Israel cannot indefinitely impose a military occupation on an increasingly militant people. The wholesale deportation of its Palestinian population in favour of a greater Israel, as a few extremists advocate, is a solution totally unacceptable to its friends, as it is, I am sure, to most Israeli citizens.

Indeed, as I found on both my fact-finding visits in 1988 and last year, the Israeli defence force which has been assigned the almost impossible task of seeking to provide a civil administration and a semblance of municipal services in the occupied territories—including, to its credit, the replacement of temporary refugee camps with planned, attractive, permanent settlements for which Israel does not receive sufficient credit—does not believe the current situation to be tenable. The only plausible solution, as it and I believe, is a political one.

In turn, it should be stressed that the Palestinians are proving equally short-sighted in failing to appreciate the political advantages of publicly ending the intifada to encourage a climate within which a dialogue can be initiated, as well as, of course, to help to restore international goodwill which they undoubtedly lost in foolishly and blatantly supporting Saddam Hussein.

Unfortunately, this situation is now threatened by a wholly new dimension, which I was also asked to investigate by the Council of Europe's Committee for Refugees, Migration and Demography. I refer to the sudden and growing number of Soviet Jewish immigrants coming into Israel—120,000 last year, 200,000 this year of the total 1·2 million invitations issued to date, and a total of at least 3 million expected by the Jewish Agency in due course. Whilst the vast majority are currently settling in Israel proper, which is their right, there is now no doubt that a growing number are settling beyond the green line. While it is suggested that the majority of Soviet Jews will not seek the labour-intensive employment performed by Palestinians in Israel, it is clear that both the employment and housing opportunities for Palestinians in Israel and its occupied territories, already under severe pressure as a consequence of the Gulf war, will become even more so as a result of this massive influx of Soviet Jews.

That situation can only become more inflammable as time goes on. For that reason alone, the new climate of reconciliation and negotiation generated by the Gulf war is timely and necessary if we are to avoid further tension and bloodshed in the occupied territories and in Israel.

At the outset, I applauded the unhurried approach currently being conducted in seeking solutions acceptable to all the parties in the middle east. It has been right to emphasise that neither the United States nor the principal European Governments involved wish to keep our forces in the region a moment longer than necessary.

It has been right to stress that we are not in the business of seeking to impose a cold-war style solution such as a Baghdad pact. It must be for the states themselves to decide on those structures which will enhance regional security, but in our bid to encourage lasting peace in the region, it is clearly sensible to recommend a process which has been proved workable and within which bilateral problems can be resolved peacefully by dialogue and consensus. As the Foreign Secretary told the UN General Assembly on 26 September of last year:

"The slow and steady progress of the CSCE process in Europe may be useful."

He continued:

"The CSCE process allows political dialogue, and has established common principles ranging from respect for borders to human rights. There is transparency through confidence and security-building measures."

He was surely correct. The CSCE process offers to the middle east a practical blueprint based on territorial integrity and the inviolability of frontiers. It would encompass many of the peace plans on offer without the disadvantages of an international conference feared by Israel.

Indeed, since my right hon. Friend spoke those words, the Foreign Ministers of 10 western Mediterranean countries, including the Mahgreb states of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, have agreed to explore further the prospect of a CSCM for the Mediterranean. In addition, Italy and Spain have proposed its extension to include the middle east—a CSCME—as the specific institution for the solution of regional crises and as a framework for co-operation for peace and security, for which the Arab League clearly would not be appropriate.

Such a process, based on the Helsinki baskets, can in no way be interpreted as an imposition of western values on a predominantly Muslim region. They are universal values upheld by the United Nations, to which all subscribe and which, indeed, are inspired by Islamic principles.

Certainly an application of basket 1, which has produced much progress in recent years in both conventional and strategic arms control and on-site verification mechanisms, is an essential element in establishing security in the region, which is the prerequisite to peace.

The principles of economic and cultural co-operation of basket 2 will be equally essential to resolve the common, long-standing problems of the region, such as the shortage of water, of energy production, and distribution, of agriculture and medicine, much of which already stands to be assisted by the guarantees of official aid from the United States of America, the Community and Japan.

Of course, the human rights principles of basket 3 will encourage greater protection of minorities and respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion in an area which is the cradle of the world's three major religions and the source of so much religious conflict over the centuries.

I remind the House of the difficulties experienced by British and American troops in conducting Christian

[Mr. Atkinson]

services in Saudi Arabia and recent alarming reports of the imprisonment and torture of four converted Christian Egyptians, about which I shall be seeing the Egyptian ambassador later today.

As a result of what the international coalition achieved, the world today is a far safer place, and weaker neighbours of stronger states can feel more secure as a result. As James Baker rightly emphasised, we now have an historic opportunity to resolve those outstanding problems in a region—the middle east—that has been the chessboard of the super-powers and the predicted trigger of a third world war for far too long. I hope that today's debate will represent a modest contribution toward that end.

10 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on raising this issue, and shall do my best to answer most of his questions. His visits to the Arab countries of the middle east and the long period that he spent in Israel will have helped him to judge the problems from both sides.

Now that Kuwait has been liberated, we are working to ensure the establishment of a just peace in the region. The main focus of our attention at present is the United Nations, where the Government have been and are closely involved in negotiations on the next Security Council resolution, which we hope will be passed shortly. We hope that the resolution will set out the conditions with which Iraq will be required to comply for a permanent end to hostilities in the Gulf. They will be comprehensive and designed to ensure that Iraq meets the requirements placed on it by the Security Council.

In the shorter term, there is a pressing need for international relief for the Iraqi civilian population. The latest reports prepared by the United Nations and non-governmental organisations such as the Save the Children Fund are very troubling. We have asked the United Nations to do everything possible to ensure that relief supplies reach Iraq as rapidly as possible.

We must also consider ways to strengthen security throughout the Gulf region to ensure that there is no repetition of the conflict. The priority tasks are to achieve progress on Gulf security, regional arms control and the Arab-Israeli question. New security arrangements in the region are matters for the Gulf states to decide. The Gulf Co-operation Council states—Syria and Egypt—have already made a good start. We welcomed the Damascus declaration issued by their Foreign Ministers on 6 March and, if asked, we stand ready to play our part. However, there is no question of British ground forces remaining permanently in the Gulf.

Thereafter, the highest priority should go to constraining the supply of material for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to the whole region. We want Iraq to comply fully with the non-proliferation treaty and with the relevant biological and chemical weapons conventions. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, we shall be working at the United Nations for the destruction, under international supervision, of Iraq's missiles and NBC capacities.

One of the important issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East raised was war crimes. Anyone who breaks the provisions of the Geneva conventions may be held liable. Thus, individual Iraqis now bear personal responsibility for breaches of them. That position was reaffirmed in Security Council resolutions 670 and 674. The superior orders defence will not be accepted as an excuse. Machinery already exists under Geneva conventions of 1967 for prosecuting grave breaches of them. The three avenues are: first, a trial before Iraqi courts; secondly, extradition for trial before courts of another party to the conventions, including other Arab states; and, thirdly, the possibility of special international tribunals. There are obvious difficulties with all those approaches, and it is too early to say what mechanisms might be applied in this case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East also mentioned Kuwait's future and the constitutional arrangement in Kuwait. It is for the Government and people of Kuwait to decide those matters, but we welcome the outcome of the Kuwait national conference last year which cleared the way for a return to the 1962 constitution and new elections for a national assembly. Difficulties and uncertainties will be inevitable in the first few months after liberation, but in a message to his people on 24 February, the Emir spoke of a national pact that will govern his country's future course. I remind my hon. Friend of the comment made by the Crown Prince on 7 March, when he recalled the Kuwaiti Government's commitment to popular participation and the 1962 constitution.

In his speech, my hon. Friend dwelt on the Palestinian question and the problems of Palestinians in Kuwait, an area that concerns him. We have repeatedly made clear to the Kuwaiti Government at a high level that alleged collaborators should be dealt with under the rule of law. We made our fears about that known even before liberation, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister repeated them to the Crown Prince when he saw him on 6 March. As our ambassador in Kuwait said, a large number of Palestinians have been screened by the Kuwaiti security forces. The aim is to indentify those who collaborated. Unfortunately, as tends to happen in such circumstances, the manner of the Kuwaiti authorities has not been particularly gentle. However, we welcome Kuwaiti assurances that the law will be respected. We shall continue to review the matter, but I emphasise that we have seen no reports of Kuwaiti authorities carrying out summary justice.

The Palestinian question is central to the affairs in the middle east. There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein set back the search for peace in the middle east. Iraq's unprovoked missile attacks on Israel have shown that Israel's fear of threat from her Arab neighbours is not unjustified. The Palestine Liberation Organisation has lost credibility by acting as an apologist for Iraq. That will undoubtedly have increased Israel's reluctance to talk to representative Palestinians.

New opportunities have, however, arisen. The coalition's action against Iraq has shown that aggression does not pay, which is important for Israel to consider. It has created a new climate for confidence-building measures, and all the states in the region will have new strategic perceptions and a new determination to live at peace. We must grasp that opportunity for progress. My hon. Friend mentioned a CSCM for the Mediterranean.

We are discussing that possibility with our European colleagues. It is worth exploring, but my hon. Friend will agree that other issues must come first.

The Americans will continue to play a central role in the peace process. We welcome President Bush's reassertion, in his speech to Congress on 6 March, that a settlement of the Arab-Israel question must be based on United Nations Security Council resolutions, especially 242 and 338, and on the principle of land for peace. Secretary of State Baker's tour of the area was a good start. It was well received by the Arabs and revealed areas of common ground on which we can build.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East drew attention to the settlements in the occupied territories of the west bank. We welcome unreservedly the liberalisation of Soviet emigration controls, including the freedom of Soviet Jews to go to Israel. But Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, including east Jerusalem, are illegal. Allowing Soviet Jews to settle there would set back further the search for peace. Recently, Israel announced that it intended to deport four Palestinians from Gaza. We deplore that intention and, with our colleagues in the European Community, are making representations about it.

I wish to refer to the principles that must underly the way ahead. The detail is not yet clear, but we believe that there is a need for discussions between Israel and the Arab states that are not at peace with her and between Israel and representative Palestinians about the future of the occupied territories. It is not realistic to imagine that there can be progress on the first without movement on the second. We have been working to achieve that. The result should be a settlement that guarantees Israel's right to exist within secure borders and the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The Arab-Israel dispute is not the only political problem in the middle east, as my hon. Friend noted. We have observed the signs of progress towards greater stability in the Lebanon and remain committed to the Taif accord as the best means of achieving a united Lebanon free of all foreign troops. We welcome the renewed undertakings of countries in the area to bring what influence they can to bear to secure the release of the British hostages still held in the Lebanon.

We are greatly concerned at the continued captivity of our three hostages in the Lebanon. We are pressing Iran, whose influence we believe to be decisive, to honour its commitment to achieve the release of western hostages, including our own. We are making clear to the Iranian Government the importance that we attach to freeing our hostages and are making it clear that future advances in our bilateral relationships with Iran depend on progress in this matter. We are also encouraging Syria to use its influence in this direction. On several occasions, the Syrians have repeated their willingness to help, and we welcome that. We shall continue to do all that we can to achieve the release of Terry Waite, Jack Mann and John McCarthy.

The peace and stability of the middle east are of vital interest to us all. The reversal of Iraqi aggression was the first of our tasks, but many more lie ahead. The determination of the coalition against Iraq and the unprecedented co-operation of the Security Council offer new hope for an international effort to win peace. We shall play our part. The United Kingdom is a permanent member of the Security Council, one of the European Twelve, a close ally of the United States and a traditional friend of many states in the region. We are determined to make the most of every opportunity in our efforts to bring a just peace to the region. We and our European Community partners continue to have an important role to play in the occupied territories. For example, we provide substantial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees and have valuable aid programmes. We also monitor human rights closely and regularly remind the Israelis of their obligations to administer the territories in accordance with the fourth Geneva convention.

Kurds in Iraq (Political Future)

10.14 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak about Iraqi Kurdistan. I strongly believe that it is right that Parliament should debate this subject before the Easter recess, as Iraq's political future may be decided in the next few days and weeks, with far-reaching consequences for the whole region.

It may interest the House to know that just before I came into the Chamber I was in contact with representatives of the Iraqi Kurds who are in almost hourly contact with bases inside Iraqi Kurdistan. They report violence on a considerable scale.

In a lead article in *The Guardian* this morning, Martin Woollacott, who is now in the region, reports:

"Saddam Hussein's forces are brutally bombarding the civilian population of Kirkuk using helicopters and artillery."

He writes:

"As we drove into the city we saw three helicopters hovering above. Every day they drop bombs at random on Kirkuk, including, the Kurds say, napalm. Every day casualties are brought into the overloaded main hospital."

Martin Woollacott then refers to corpses in the foyer of the hospital and to the hospital not having enough surgeons. He writes:

"At one point orderlies rushed towards us with a cardboard box containing a baby. A mother was caught in the napalm attack two days ago and died in the hospital. The napalm had burned through to her womb, injuring the baby which the medical staff tried to save. They delivered the child, amputated one of the burned legs, and put the baby into what passes for intensive care."

I draw attention to that report because one of the main issues that I wish to raise is the use of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter gunships by the Iraqi authorities.

My principal and most immediate aim in raising this debate is to ask the Government to press the coalition forces to issue a statement at once insisting that the terms of the ceasefire are complied with, that those terms include the requirement that all Iraqi combat aircraft, whether fixed-wing or helicopters, are grounded and that, if Saddam Hussein does not immediately comply, those aircraft will be shot down without further notice.

I remind the House that, in an interview broadcast last night the allied commander in the Gulf, General Schwarzkopf, told David Frost that Iraq was given permission to fly its helicopters only for civil, humanitarian and internal administrative purposes and that he had been lied to and "suckered" by Iraqi ceasefire negotiators as to their use. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater confirmed that the use of combat helicopters violated the oral and written agreements between the two sides. United States commanders confirmed that, although they were more difficult to track, helicopter gunships could be dealt with as effectively as Iraqi fixed-wing aircraft. Even as late as last night, Lieutenant-General Sir Peter de la Billiere stated that Iraq had breached the ceasefire agreement with the use of helicopter gunships. What will be done about that? What will the coalition forces do about it?

I want to make it clear that I am in no way advocating that coalition ground troops should be deployed further within Iraq. I am merely urging that Saddam Hussein should be deprived of aircraft that have been used to deliver weapons of mass destruction against civilians, who have no defence against aerial attack. If those aircraft are not grounded now, we may well shortly receive further horrific reports about attacks not only with napalm, phosphorous and sulphuric acid, but, as was evidenced only too clearly by what happened in Halabja during the war with Iran, with mustard and nerve gas. Clearly they must remain on the agenda.

We have the proven capability to stop these atrocities. If we fail once again to act, we cannot help but be implicated in Saddam Hussein's massacres. The coalition fought the war that made the uprising possible. President Bush himself called for the uprising. We cannot now wash our hands of the consequences.

It is clear that there is a grave humanitarian problem in Iraq. The report of the Secretary General of the United Nations which was published only yesterday paints a grim picture of progressively worsening human catastrophe. The imminent temperature rise in Iraq will add cholera and typhoid epidemics to the number of intestinal and respiratory diseases and to the increasing incidence of malnutrition. The recent Oxfam/Save the Children report confirmed that the population of Baghdad depended on the sewage-polluted Tigris for drinking water, which is therefore infected.

The situation in the south is so desperate and confused that almost no reliable areawide reports exist, and the only information is the anecdotal evidence of American soldiers who are sickened by the growing results of the human tragedy that they are being forced to witness. In the north, an estimated 6 million people are facing acute shortages of food and medical supplies, and there is no fuel to power the flour mills. Since the start of the uprising, Saddam Hussein has deliberated used the politics of hunger against the liberated areas. It is reported that, without syringes, antibiotics and even the most basic medical supplies, Kurdish forces, who have sustained more than 11,000 casualties according to reports, have to cope with the needs of injured refugees fleeing from the remaining Ba'ath-controlled territory.

The Iraqi-Kurdistan Front, which is a coalition of all the Kurdish groups, has repeatedly asked for the UN Security Council to be reconvened to consider the growing seriousness of the situation. Only yesterday, the IKF promised to provide safe passage for the International Committee of the Red Cross to bring in aid on the understanding that it would go to all areas of Iraq, including the liberated areas. Kurdish leaders agreed to do everything possible to help the civilian population, despite the knowledge that, even with safeguards, Saddam Hussein may well succeed in keeping the food and medicine from Kurdistan and that his distribution of it may even help to prop up his regime and lend it some spurious political legitimacy.

As the IKF has established administrative control of Kurdistan and has the means to deliver aid where it is most needed, I strongly urge that it is delivered directly to the IKF either by road convoy from Turkey to Syria or Iran or by air to captured northern airfields under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross or some other reputable body, as is the case in Ethiopia.

I shall now deal with the issue of Iraq's internal political dynamics and the likely outcome of the uprising. It is becoming clear that elements in the United States Defence Department favour the suppression of the opposition and the striking of some deal with a Ba'ath regime headed by someone other than Saddam Hussein. That is the wrong

way forward, because Saddam Hussein and the Iraq regime are inseparable. It is a fascist, totalitarian and terrorist regime and is historically unique in remaining covert, even in government. By its recent actions and, in particular, by its attacks on Islamic holy places, it has lost any trace of legitimacy with the majority Shi'ite population, certainly in the south. It has been shown merely to have used Islamic feeling for its own perverse and strictly secular objectives.

The only way to achieve political stability in Iraq and in that region is to establish a democratised, pluralistic society which respects the human collective rights of all peoples of Iraq, perhaps through the setting up of a federation or confederation of autonomous regions which meet the aspirations of Kurdish, Shi'ite and other groups. The risk to the world community if it fails to support this democratic movement is much greater than any risk involved in the potential breakdown of opposition unity. The cohesion of the opposition forces is remarkable. The Shi'ite parties appear to have dropped any claim to establish an Islamic republic. Many Shi'ites have said that they have learned from their exile in Iran the need to avoid the excesses of Islamic fundamentalism.

If I were a Kurd in the anger of conflict, I would want a separate independent state, but these moderate, responsible people have put that claim aside. Many have positively rejected it. Their leader, Jalal Talabani, who has just returned to a tumultuous welcome in Iraqi Kurdistan, publicly told his fighters that this is an uprising not just of Kurdistan but of the whole of Iraq. An indication of their objectivity is that, far from taking revenge on Iraqi army prisoners, they are giving them parcels and sending them safely home through Kurdish lines. If these forces of toleration and democracy are given the support of the world community, they will never forget it. If we let them down, neither shall we. If democratic forces receive no assistance from the world community and are defeated as a result, it will send forth a message about the prospects for democracy in the middle east that will last a generation. Such a message would not be helpful.

The recent IKF offer to set up a provisional Government should be considered, if not now certainly in the near future. At this stage, it might not find ready takers, for reasons that we understand, but when the regime of Saddam Hussein is toppled, or even he is toppled, it should be considered as a realistic option pending the establishment of a more stable, long-term and permanent arrangement.

Let us now consider arms sales to Iraq. I supported the war, but I did not dwell on arms sales during the war because that was not the right time to do so. We must now legitimately ask how it all happened and what can be done to stop it in future. Will it happen again? I am concerned that once the conflict has been resolved and sanctions lifted, some spurious justification will be found to re-arm Iraq and to arm further the countries in that region. The Government claim that existing legislation adequately deals with military exports, but that is nonsense. We all recall the excuses by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement when he was Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry over the supergun affair. The attitude to arms sales was flog them and damn the consequences, but that cannot be accepted in future. It must stop.

We need an international initiative which clearly monitors our exports as well as those of Germany, France and other major arms exporters. International co-operation is needed to overcome the widespread abuse of end user certificates, bills of lading and other export documents. In that context, I envisage an enhanced role for the UN. How can we develop that role? The way towards the much talked about, but, as yet, theoretical, new world order, which I strongly support, is to strengthen the United Nations.

On a recent visit to America, I pressed with representatives of the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House the case for an enhanced United Nations role. At a meeting yesterday with representatives of the Chinese embassy, for reasons which I am sure my hon. Friends will understand I pressed for a sympathetic response to the question of the United Nations being given a role, not just in interstate conflicts but in conflicts within states. The United Nations should be able to deal with conflicts within states which threaten the peace and stability of whole regions.

In a beautifully scripted article in *The Guardian*, Kenneth Galbraith recently argued for an enhanced role for the United Nations in tackling poverty as the root cause of world instability. He said:

"the UN must have authority to end and reverse not only aggression by one country against another, but also mass slaughter and destruction within a country. As the UN should exercise sovereignty, so it should have power when sovereignty is outrageously misused to suspend it. Modern mass horror now results, if anything, less from international conflict, than from internal conflict and massacre. The most elementary requirement of the new world order is the need for it to take on the responsiblity for stopping internal butchery."

This new role for the UN must not remain an academic dream but must start now, today, with the declaration that all Iraqi combat aircraft, fixed-wing and helicopter, must be grounded or they will be shot down, and that if weapons of mass destruction are used, the UN will not stand idly by. This is an historic opportunity for the UN once again to begin the process of establishing a meaningful role. If it fails to act, it will be enormously demaged, because it will be implicated in the slaughter of civilians that has already begun. The time for deliberation is over. It is time to act.

I pay tribute to the level-headedness and courage shown by leading statesmen in both Turkey and Iran throughout the crisis. I know that Iranians are deeply suspicious of the motives of the west—a perfectly understandable attitude after their experiences under the Shah, who was for many years propped up by the west. The west owes a debt of gratitude to Iran for its handling of the conflict and the peculiar but important position that it took throughout the war in the Gulf. I hope that it will lead to a growing understanding between the peoples of the United Kingdom and that country. We should all be grateful to it for the role that it played.

10.31 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) for allowing me some of his time during this Adjournment debate.

It is an indictment of the House that, while the Gulf war was raging, we had almost daily statements on the conduct of the war, but since the perceived end of it, there has been not one statement on the situation inside Iraq or on the great troubles caused to its people. Were it not for the squalid manoeuvring of the Government over the past few

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

days, rushing through legislation which they think will bring them electoral gain, there should have been a statement on that situation.

There is no doubt that the people of Iraq are suffering a great deal, and this has been shown by the many reports from broadcasters and journalists. They have seen their country so badly damaged that it has returned to a pre-industrial stage. They grieve for tens of thousands of sons and husbands killed on the battlefield. According to the direct testimony of the United Nations, Save the Children and Oxfam, all of which have recently sent their observers into the country, they face starvation, serious epidemic and disease. It is disgraceful that I am forced to raise this important issue in an Adjournment debate.

The people of Iraq continue, despite appalling difficulties, to try to overthrow Saddam Hussein, who brought them to this catastrophe. Meanwhile, the killing and the dying continue. Over the past few years, I have chaired the Campaign against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq—a national organisation of which many of my hon. Friends are members. As the records will show, it has continually brought to the attention of the House the appalling human rights record of the Saddam Hussein regime.

We were loud and persistent voices, whose pleas fell on deaf ears. Over six years, we told the House about the disappearance of women and children, of torture, execution and public hangings, and of oppression and dictatorship. After Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against the Kurds at Halabja, killing at least 5,000 people and razing 4,000 Kurdish villages to the ground, I and some of my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) urged the Government to use sanctions against Iraq. I am sorry to say that there was little response. Saddam Hussein continued to be treated as a valuable friend until 2 August last year.

Then came the invasion of Kuwait, and everything changed. There was the Gulf war, but, while Kuwait has been liberated, we still do not know the extent of the death toll inside Iraq. Because of my long involvement with the opposition in Iraq, I have recently attended two international conferences to discuss how that opposition can be co-ordinated internationally, to the greatest effect. I went to Washington to a meeting organised by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and to Sweden, to a meeting organised by the Swedish Save the Children Fund. The Kurds argued in all those meetings that they wanted autonomy within Iraq and the protection of their language and culture in the other countries in which they live.

Throughout the Gulf war, we said that we had no quarrel with the Iraqi people. If that is the case, we now have a responsibility to show that. That responsibility is enshrined in the Geneva convention of 1949, the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and the world summit for children. The UN mission found in Baghdad that normal life had almost come to a halt. The situation in the south and Basra is believed to be dramatically worse because of severe fighting. With military attention now reportedly turning to the north, the situation there might deteriorate further. Certainly for refugees in the south, the allied forces in the area may be able to play a humanitarian role.

No meaningful quantities of food supplies have been imported since the start of sanctions. Until then, 70 per cent. of Iraq's food came from imports. There is immediate danger of major disease and epidemic. Water and sewerage services are in a critical state, with a consequent danger to health. In the children's hospital in Baghdad, the admission of children with diarrheal diseases has increased fourfold. Cholera, typhoid and hepatitis threaten the population. The health service is in a state of collapse because of the lack of power, fuel and communications. In numerous places, sewage is flowing in the streets. Maternal and child health services are particularly affected. The medical immunisation system, which had been one of the most advanced in the developing world, has broken down almost completely. Antenatal care has almost ceased, There are reports of high-risk delivery at home, with no help. Medicines and drugs are in short supply. At present, the central warehouses are empty. Distribution of relief supplies of drugs are being held up for lack of fuel.

The United Nations report states bluntly:

"It is unmistakable that the Iraqi people may soon face a further, imminent catastrophe which could include epidemic and famine, if life supporting needs are not rapidly met."

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, said this week that he was shocked by the scale of Iraq's humanitarian problems. The Minister said this morning that he, too, thinks that this is a troubling situation. All the evidence shows that basic foodstuffs such as flour are now critically low, and the supplies of sugar, rice, tea, vegetable oil, powdered milk and pulses are also in short supply or have been exhausted altogether.

The situation for women and children is desperate, because they are the most vulnerable at times of war. Sufficient water for basic needs is not available in most homes and, when available, is in short supply. The collection of water from rivers and the search for fuel put a great strain on women. All the children are at home as the schools have been closed since the start of bombardment. The team was repeatedly informed of and observed the fear felt by children at being left alone. Women bear the burden of these additional care needs. The rations available are less than half of the daily requirement of a five-year-old child, or less than one third of the daily requirement of a pregnant woman. Obviously, that is not enough for subsistence.

The United Nations has warned of an impending disaster, in which large numbers of civilians will die needlessly from disease and, perhaps, starvation, unless a major international aid effort is undertaken. Iraq's needs are enormous. The required emergency aid has been evaluated at $23 million, and includes food, medicines, fuel for electricity generators, alum and chlorine to clean and disinfect the water supply, and new pipes and spare parts for the water system.

The United Nations committee on sanctions against Iraq has agreed to allow unrestricted food shipments, but so far donors have pledged—and, more importantly, contributed—only $4·5 million. The west has a humanitarian responsibility to provide and to speed up that aid. It should try by every means to bring about a conclusion to that ghastly war, so that millions of innocent men, women and children are not made to endure even more suffering.

10.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is to be congratulated on raising this subject for debate. The contribution of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) was forceful. Everyone listening to the debate will share the outrage and indignation that they expressed.

The Government are under no illusions about the appalling nature of the Iraqi regime. We have made clear our deep concern about many aspects of Saddam Hussein's policies, and we have taken the firmest possible measures to register that fact. Our close involvement in removing Iraq from Kuwait is, as I am sure hon. Members would agree, just the latest evidence of our determination to ensure that Iraq is forced to respect internationally accepted standards of behaviour.

I address the House against the background of a considerable amount of activity at the United Nations in New York. The United Nations Security Council is currently discussing the terms for a formal ceasefire in the Gulf, and we anticipate a resolution before Easter. I am sure that there will be tough terms in any such resolution, and it is right that they should be tough. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we want included in those terms an internationally supervised destruction of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological facilities and weapons, and of Iraq's non-conventional and ballistic missile capabilities. Iraq must never again be in a position to threaten the security of her neighbours.

I am sure that hon. Members will understand that, because of the deliberations, discussions and exchanges of views between the members of the Security Council in anticipation of a debate and resolution, I cannot go into much detail about what is being discussed in New York. The hon. Members for Workington and for Cynon Valley should be in no doubt of the determination being expressed by our representatives. I can say with some confidence that although the resolution may not satisfy every point raised by the hon. Member for Workington, I hope that there will be some aspects relevant to those points.

We shall continue closely to monitor the position in Iraq. The Baghdad regime can be in no doubt about our determination to ensure that it continues to meet its international obligations. In particular, no one here, or anywhere else in the world community, will tolerate the use of chemical weapons against the people of Iraq. We shall take the severest measures if the Iraqi regime resorts to the use of those dreadful weapons.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I have supported virtually everything that the Government have done during the past few months. The Select Committee on Defence visited Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Bahrain last week. Is the Minister sure that in this volatile situation—especially with the requirement that Iraq complies with the terms of the ceasefire—there are sufficient British forces remaining in the Gulf for the next few months to act as a lever? As the Minister is well aware, it is a very delicate position which still requires the threat of the use of force to ensure compliance.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, and as I have already made clear, it is not our intention to have permanent security forces in the middle east. However, I take his point. I am satisfied that we have the capacity to deal with any possible problem, and that we can reinforce that capacity if necessary. However, we are not contemplating the need for any such activity, and I speak today against that background.

One of the most important concerns has been Iraq's treatment of its Kurdish minorities over many years. Some 20 per cent. of the Iraqi population are Kurds, concentrated largely in the north and north-eastern areas. They are a distinct cultural and ethnic community. We have taken action whenever there has been clear evidence of human rights abuses against the Kurds. At the 1989 meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Britain co-sponsored a resolution condemning Iraq's human rights record. This year, the commission—with our support—has appointed a special rapporteur to investigate the human rights position in Iraq. We expect the Government of Iraq to co-operate with the rapporteur in completing his report.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister has used such phrases as, "We expect the Government of Iraq to co-operate," and, "We have supported resolutions condemning," and so on. He must know that such words mean nothing to Saddam Hussein. Helicopter gunships are being used to bomb civilian populations with all sorts of weapons. What action are the Government, the United Nations, the Americans and the coalition forces taking to ensure that that stops today, before a major battle breaks out? I am referring not to protests or to condemnations but to action.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would allow me to make my speech in my own way. I have a passage in it that specifically deals with his question. I may not be able to satisfy him, but I will not shirk the issue.

In 1988-89, we reacted firmly to reports that the Iraqi Government were acting systematically to quell what they considered to be action by Kurdish rebels in the north, and to relocate large numbers of Iraqi Kurds against their will. The most notorious example of Saddam Hussein's brutality against the Kurds was the use of chemical weapons at Halabja in March 1988. Many hundreds, if not thousands, of people were killed. When the massacre became known, we played a major role in securing the adoption of Secretary Council resolutions condemning Iraq's use of such weapons.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It may happen again tomorrow.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would allow me to continue with my speech.

Britain has some of the strictest controls in the world to ensure that precursors for chemical weapons do not reach brutal regimes such as that in Iraq.

Before I deal with the specific points raised by the hon. Member for Workington, I want to say something about past arms sales to Iraq. Since 1980 Britain has had in place clear guidelines preventing the sale of arms to Iraq. Those guidelines were further tightened in 1985 and, despite the end of the war with Iran, the Government have quite deliberately maintained the policy of not selling arms to Saddam Hussein. British weapons were not used in the invasion of Kuwait; nor are they now being used by the Iraqi regime in its brutal repression of its own people.

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the need for tighter arms control. We have made it clear that arms proliferation is one of the issues that need to be addressed following Iraq's expulsion from Kuwait. I know that other leading members of the allied forces in the coalition share that concern. We shall certainly be considering what more we can do to control arms exports and we have already begun discussions on the subject with our EC colleagues, the United States and the Soviet Union. It is not a matter which will be in any way overlooked in the months ahead.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will there have to be legislation?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That will have to be considered. I have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

We have, over the years, been in contact with Kurdish groups in Iraq to exchange views with them and to hear their representations. Those contacts have continued and on 7 March the Minister of State, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), met a representative delegation from the Iraqi opposition, including a representative of the Kurdish minority. The hon. Member for Workington referred to Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and we have also met and talked to him.

We recognise the intelligent way in which the PUK approaches its problems. We welcome the desire of the Iraqi opposition to co-operate and their common platform of democracy and respect for human rights in Iraq, as well as their wish to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It is of considerable significance that they should adopt such a position. We share those goals. They would allow the Kurds in Iraq their legitimate right to self-expression, which has always been our goal and will continue to be so.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Minister accept that one of the great injustices in the region since the first world war has been the treatment of the Kurdish people? It is a deeply felt belief among Kurdish people throughout the region that they have been suppressed and oppressed by the national Governments and by the ignorance of the international community. Will the Minister make it clear that the British Government accept the right of Kurdish people to their own culture, language and autonomy—it is clearly stated by the Kurdish Democratic party and the PUK—within the national frontiers of Iraq? That would go a long way towards helping people to realise that the Kurdish people have been so badly treated for so long.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I think that everyone is aware of the interest shown by many hon. Members on both sides of the House in the Kurdish people and how they have been brought into focus as a result of the Gulf war. As I say, we share the goals of the Kurdish people to enjoy their legitimate right of self-expression. That has always been our goal, and that encompasses and underlines the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I apologise for the fact that I was not able to be here at the beginning of the debate, but on that point does my hon. Friend agree that there is considerable concern about the genocide that is taking place in the country? Might it be possible for some supplies to be airlifted to those areas that are suffering hardship?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall deal with those points, which were raised by the hon. Member for Workington.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the helicopter gunships that appear to be being used in Iraq in breach of the ceasefire. The terms of the present de facto ceasefire—we have not had the United Nations resolution—relate to the conflict with Iraq over Kuwait. It does not relate to the internal situation in Iraq. However, the coalition made it clear in the terms of the de facto ceasefire that fixed-wing aircraft should not be allowed to fly. As the hon. Gentleman knows, action has been taken to ensure that fixed-wing aircraft do not fly.

However, while we deeply deplore the use of helicopter gunships, we have to accept that there is no Security Council resolution or mandate to deal with the action that the Iraqis have taken with helicopters. It is not a part of the ceasefire and it is not a part of a United Nations resolution. However distressing it is for me to say this to the hon. Gentleman, and however distressing it is for him to hear it, I think that he will accept that all of us have to recognise that a mandate from the United Nations is essential to underline and to give support to any hostile actions in the Gulf.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: But over and above any decisions taken by the United Nations, General Schwarzkopf came to an oral and written agreement, part of which was that helicopters could be used inside Iraq only for humanitarian and internal administrative purposes. So it could be said that the war ended on the basis of an agreement which is now being breached. Therefore, irrespective of the United Nations position, surely we have some responsibility in enforcing what has already been agreed. In addition, resolution 678, which refers to peace and security in the region and the restoration thereof, is also being breached. Surely we have a responsibility to uphold that resolution without any further United Nations resolution being necessary.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and I shall consider what he reports as the informal agreement of General Schwarzkopf, but I think that he will agree that we cannot make much progress in our debates here if we seek to interpret in minute detail the possible consequences of all United Nations resolutions. As I said to him, the United Nations is debating the matter and we expect further clarification of what transpires there. I shall look into the point that he makes about General Schwarzkopf's agreement, but the de facto ceasefire dealt with fixed-wing aircraft, not helicopters, which is one of the difficulties that we have to face.

The hon. Member for Workington, I think the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, and certainly my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) referred to food aid. We are greatly concerned about the genuine humanitarian needs of all Iraqis. We have already contributed nearly $5 million to the Red Cross Gulf appeal and nearly $1 million to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency appeal. There is clearly a role for the United Nations and its agencies, but it would be unwise for me to say too much about activity to bring humanitarian relief

and food to the Kurdish people. We are facing a civil war, in which all attempts will be made to prevent any assistance of that kind reaching its objectives.

Mrs. Clwyd: I raised the question of humanitarian aid and the fact that so little has been pledged. I am not asking the Government to go into detail; I am saying that the people of Iraq are suffering greatly. Is Britain prepared to make a further contribution over and above what it has already made, in particular, to aid the people in Kurdistan, whom we know are fighting a pitched battle at the moment? Surely supply lines can be opened up through Turkey. Will the Minister facilitate that?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I would like to comment on what the hon. Lady says, but she knows that I cannot give an undertaking from the Dispatch Box to change Government policy. Certainly the issue has been raised and will be considered.

In the last minute I shall touch on one or two other matters. An annual report was produced by the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Ahtisaari on the present situation in Iraq, which makes the most depressing reading and is a testament to the misguided policies of Saddam Hussein. We are doing all that we can to assist, as I have said, and I have noted what the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said. However, we have also made it clear that we believe that aid should reach all areas of Iraq and we shall continue to do all that we can to alleviate the suffering of all the Iraqi people.

In conclusion, we will shed no tears if and when Saddam Hussein is removed from power. That must be a matter for the Iraqi people, with whom we have no quarrel and whom we do not wish to suffer further under political tyranny. We wish to see a truly democratic Iraq in which the Kurdish minorities enjoy full political and human rights, and we look forward to the emergence of an Iraq that can once again be welcomed as a responsible member of the international community.

GATT Textiles Negotiations

11 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I welcome my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box to answer this brief debate. I am sure that he will appreciate that he is just the latest in a succession of his right hon. and hon. Friends who have responded to debates on textiles. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), who I hope will also catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recall that we have sat here on many occasions in past years. He may agree that one of the difficulties has been the large number of Ministers who have been responsible for the textile trade. It is certainly no disparagement of my hon. Friend to say that, by the time that they have been in office for a couple of years, they often come to understand something about the industry, but sadly we then have to start all over again.

Many people are under the mistaken impression that the textile industry favours special pleading with the objective of retaining protection for its interests. Let me therefore make it clear that the textile industry does not want protectionism. What it does want is a market in which its products are free to compete with others from around the world. Given a fair measure of genuine competition, the products of this country's textile industry can more than hold their own anywhere.

The term "level playing field" is a hackneyed one. Sometimes I think that our industry's managers and work force would be prepared to put up with a fairly hefty slope, provided that the goal at which they were aiming was not half the width of the one at the other end of the ground, and if some of the opposition were occasionally penalised for carrying the ball instead of kicking it as they should.

Before I consider the issues relating to the GATT negotiations, I want to spend a moment considering the state of the textile industry generally. An important measure is the number of jobs which it provides. When I come to the House in June 1979, textiles and clothing employed some 780,000 people. This figure itself represented a considerable reduction over the previous decade from the million or so employed at the beginning of the 1970s.

The recession of the early 1980s had a traumatic effect. By June 1983, one in three of the remaining jobs had gone, and the figure stood at a mere 512,000. Let it be said that the impact of the recession was not all bad by any means. While it is a fact that not every firm which went out of business or contracted severely in size was poorly managed or inefficient, some undoubtedly were. The ones which survived the shake-out had to use all their ingenuity and enterprise to survive. Very often they went to secure new export markets, which have stood them in good stead ever since. It was perhaps of little comfort to those who lost their jobs at that time that the shake-out made the jobs of those who remained more secure, but it was nevertheless a fact.

We emerged with a leaner but fitter industry—one which was determined to survive in a sometimes hostile environment, for the industry has always been subject to cycles never experienced by those involved in other sectors. Confidence in the future provided a spur to investment, and productivity improved considerably. Quality had never been a problem, but in the last few years there have been quite amazing advances in our design skills as well as

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marketing capabilities—consider, for example, the modern computerised equipment that is now used to design material.

As a result of the industry's successes, there were as many employed in it by the autumn of 1988 as there had been in June 1983, confounding the pessimists and giving everyone hope that the future could be a good one. This gave encouragement to those seeking to recruit the brightest and most energetic young people to a career in textiles.

Since 1989, there has been a further and most alarming series of job losses. During that year, 35,000 jobs disappeared, and a further 23,000 in 1990, so that by the end of last year the total number was only 449,000. A particularly worrying feature is that many of the companies which have been hit this time have done all the right things, assessed on any rational criteria. They have invested in the most modern plant and equipment and have become extremely efficient, but there was no way that they could compete with artificially low prices, often brought about by anti-competitive practices encouraged and promoted by overseas Governments.

For instance, Maple Mill at Oldham, closed by Courtaulds Spinning last month, was a highly efficient manufacturer of open-end yarns, operating to the best international productivity standards. However, subsidised competition, in a climate of falling demand and world-wide overcapacity, drove yarn prices down to a point where the mill was no longer viable, despite flexible working arrangements introduced with the full co-operation of all employees.

In general terms, the work force in the textile industry has co-operated in the necessary restructuring of the industry. I am glad to say that another firm in my constituency, Weavestyle, is doing much better and we look for great things for it in future. It is another Courtaulds subsidiary.

The distortions in the international textile and clothing trade take many forms. Some activities make it impossible for United Kingdom producers to compete on equal terms within the market place. Others are intended to create barriers to our exporters by protecting a home market against imported goods in ways that are outrageous by any standards.

One of the worst offenders, in terms of its effect on our industry, is the United States. That country's purchasing power and its preference for quality goods, which we manufacture, make the severe restrictions placed upon imports from Britain especially unacceptable, bearing in mind the attacks by America on the unfair trading practices of some far eastern countries. Import duties of over 36 per cent. on wool cloth represent a terrific hurdle for our exporters, who see their United States counterparts faced with only a 14 per cent. European Community tariff to gain entry to the enticing British home market. If reciprocity is to be our goal, as I believe it should be, then that is as good a point as any at which to start.

South Korea is one of the fastest-growing economies, not only around the Pacific rim but in global terms. In the past, it has used high tariffs and quotas as alternative methods of excluding imports that would otherwise enjoy strong demand from its increasingly prosperous people. In many instances, our protests have ultimately proved successful. Now Korea has announced a £2·5 billion subsidy scheme for its textile and clothing industries.

In India, millions of people live in poverty. Like many other states, India benefits from the recognition accorded to that factor under the terms of the multi-fibre arrangement, which are intended to assist its textile industry—along with others on the Indian subcontinent—to gain a fair share of the world market. Nevertheless, India too has a relatively well-off middle class, which no doubt wants a greater choice of goods. It does not have that choice, because India prohibits imports of textiles and clothing if similar goods are produced domestically, and charges penal tariffs of 200 per cent. or more on the remainder.

Nor is India by any means unique: other developing countries impose duties of more than 100 per cent., and many also have restrictive licensing schemes. Unacceptably high tariffs remain the favoured protectionist device of several countries whose economies could never be considered anything but highly developed. Canada and Australia fall into that category; yet some Australian tariffs exceed 50 per cent.

Turkish textile and clothing producers may express themselves delighted by the favours that they receive from their Government, but the many British workers who have lost their jobs because their employers closed down as a result of their inability to compete with subsidised Turkish goods feel rather differently about the matter. Among the subsidies enjoyed by Turkish firms are supplies of cotton at prices below those that can be obtained on world markets. Meanwhile, importers—including British companies—are faced with a barrage of duties, including a requirement to contribute to the state housing fund. Although all those subsidies and barriers contravene Turkey's associate treaty status with the European Community, the country seeks yet more favoured treatment from the Twelve.

As a state trading country, China sells textiles and clothing at prices that bear no relation to production costs. Former communist countries in eastern Europe, which are only now moving away from state control, operate in much the same way. Their economies are usually fragile, and I believe as much as anyone else—perhaps more than many—that they should have our support, but not at the expense of the United Kingdom textile sector.

Subsidised exports are another favourite ploy. In some cases, developing countries provide favoured tax treatment for export sales, while many far eastern countries link their currencies artificially to the US dollar, keeping them undervalued and so making their exports more competitive. In Taiwan and Japan, brand names may be registered that give a false impression of United Kingdom origin. I know that, because I have seen the goods in Keighley, where they have openly been sent for processing.

Furthermore, I am afraid that even some Community members—while expressing their commitment to Community policies, and saying how communautaire they are—are less than scrupulous. Spain and Italy continue to subsidise their industries, while some Belgian firms have not been made to comply with European Court judgments requiring the repayment of illegal subsidies.

Let me turn now to the GATT negotiations themselves. Of course I welcome their resumption following agreement between the participants that talks on agriculture should

again proceed. However, continued further progress remains uncertain, depending essentially on United States congressional acceptance of the presidential plea for an extension of the so-called fast-track procedure. The fact that the American textile industry and other interests are opposed to the Uruguay round will put pressure on Congressmen, and the outcome cannot be precisely predicted.

Our ultimate objective must undoubtedly be an agreement, as a result of the Uruguay round, which provides for greatly strengthened GATT rules and disciplines to apply to international trade in textiles and clothing. This means that we need not just good intentions —those have been expressed many times in the past—but mechanisms to deal with the practices that I have described. The British textile industry supports the European Community's call for reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers; for prohibition of all subsidies that distort trade, including the supply of raw materials to an industry at artificially low prices; for tougher rules to prevent the blatant theft of designs and brand names; for realistic anti-dumping rules that take account of the complex nature of the industry; and for a selective safeguards article, with no automatic compensation requirement.

Some progress has been made in negotiating those strengthened rules and disciplines, but much more remains to be done before the round is completed. I do not want now to consider the proposals in greater depth, because the time required to reach agreement will, I think, ensure that we have opportunities for further debate in the future. My priority at this stage is to ensure that we progress further in a way that avoids unnecessary uncertainty, which is the undoubted enemy of all successful trade and commerce.

It is generally accepted—even among developing countries—that the multi-fibre arrangement, which is a derogation from GATT, should be phased out over 10 or 11 years. However, the integration of the textile and clothing trade into normal GATT rules demands the simultaneous achievement and implementation of strengthened rules and disciplines. Some progress has been made in agreeing the details of implementation, but several important issues remain to be settled, including the crucial need for a mechanism enabling the phasing-out process to be suspended for any country that fails to comply with its obligations. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the direct link between the phasing out of the MFA and the introduction of strengthened GATT rules and disciplines. There have been far too many examples of loopholes being exploited in the past.

If extension of the fast track is agreed, it will be for a period allowing negotiatons to continue until 1 March 1993—two years from now. Of course, not only the Government and the Community but also the industry share the hope that the Uruguay round will be concluded long before then—preferably before the end of this year, if that is at all possible. Nevertheless, it may be the beginning of 1993, or even later, before the round is completed, ratified and brought into effect, given the procedural steps required in the United States in particular. Thus, it will be necessary to extend the current term of the multi-fibre arrangement, due to expire on 31 July 1991, together with the Community's bilateral agreements which expire on 31 December, excepting those for China, which continue until the end of next year. Agreement needs to be reached as soon as possible on the length of the extension to avoid damaging uncertainty for all concerned.

Currently, the participants are considering the length of time for which the MFA and the bilateral agreements should be extended. I understand that most Community member states favour the extension of the MFA for 17 months, to the end of 1992, with the possibility of a further extension if the Uruguay round is not ready for implementation. The industry supports that approach. Many developing countries, too, take a similar view. The United States of America—I point out this fact to the Minister—has proposed an extension for 29 months, to the end of 1993.

Another important point is that most countries envisage a straightforward extension of the existing terms. In contrast, I gather from the Minister for Trade's response to my parliamentary question on 20 March that the British Government continue to argue for an extension of the MFA for only five months, to the end of this year. In practice, that would have no effect, since the bilateral agreements continue until then, in any event. It is impossible for GATT to be ready for implementation at that stage. The Government evidently accept that extension of the MFA for a further 21 months to the end of 1992 may then be necessary, but they argue that the terms of the MFA and the bilateral agreements should be modified for the additional year.

There are several reasons why it would be mistaken to weaken the terms for this further year. First and foremost, it would provide additional concessions to exporting countries, whether or not they were willing to play their part in contributing to strengthening the rules and disciplines that I regard as critical. Secondly, it would increase the base level from which the phasing out of the MFA will be applied, to the obvious detriment of the United Kingdom industry. Thirdly, it could only cause the most damaging uncertainty, not only to manufacturers and processors but to retailers and importers, as well as exporters overseas. We need advance knowledge of the terms on which trade will take place.

As for retailers and distributors, it is particularly significant that senior management of the Littlewoods Organisation, whom I met on Thursday of last week, are equally keen to see a simple extension of the MFA for a reasonable period. I received a short note from that organisation this morning which reads:

"We are concerned that the continuing dispute over agricultural issues may result in the MFA not being replaced when it lapses in July 1991. This is already creating uncertainty and disruption in our forward planning with suppliers for the coming autumn season. We are therefore asking the European Commission as a matter of urgency to give a firm undertaking that, until a new MFA is in place, they will continue to operate the present Arrangement"—

I stress those words—

"and the specific quotas established under it, thus guaranteeing continuity of supply."

It is rare in this industry for all parties to agree in that way. It suggests that it would not be in the interests of consumers to cause turmoil by increasing uncertainty. Finally, a short-term approach would mean duplication of the MFA extension negotiations and a proliferation of complex bilateral negotiations, just at the time when negotiators world wide should be concentrating on a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round.

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The Government's position regarding the United Kingdom's approach to the interim period is curiously incomprehensible. It is at variance with our European Community partners, with the United States, with most developing countries, with the British apparel, knitting and textile industries and with United Kingdom importers and overseas exporters. The extension of the MFA does not mean that there would be a standstill, as some fear. The current bilateral arrangements incorporate progressive increases in quotas, which could presumably be carried over into 1992. Thus, the momentum of liberalisation, to which the Government are committed, would undoubtedly be maintained.

On the question of the length of the phasing-out period for the MFA, last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry first suggested that it should be between five and seven years. His approach did not endear him to the industry. Eventually, under pressure from the industry and several of his hon. Friends, he accepted that 10 years might not be inappropriate. I hope that this time he will see the logic of the case and will amend his position rather than be thought to be falling into line involuntarily while alienating the industry.

After all, despite the contraction to which I referred at the beginning of my speech, the textiles and clothing industry remains one of the United Kingdom's largest sources of employment. Its work force of nearly 450,000, located largely in the north, the midlands and Scotland, is well placed to play a significant role in determining whether my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will still be at the Dispatch Box after the next election. It is vital, therefore, that the Government should be seen to be fighting their corner and working for the survival of a vibrant textile industry that is, has been and certainly can continue to be one of our best exporters—a success in the marketplace of the world.

11.27 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) have the Minister's consent to speak in the debate?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Community Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Madden: I congratulate the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate. He, like I, has the honour to represent a constituency in west Yorkshire. I wish to emphasise the importance of the clothing and textile industries to west Yorkshire.

A recent study to investigate the economic prospects of the west Yorkshire region in the 1990s highlighted the importance of the textile and clothing industries to the regional economy. The study was commissioned by west Yorkshire's five district councils and was undertaken by the university of Louvain in Belgium and the United Kingdom's Cambridge Economic Consultants.

The main points highlighted by the study were the increased and national vulnerability of textiles and clothing due to the shift of production towards south and east Europe and south-west Asia; the continuing threats to the industries caused by exchange rate variations and subsidised competitors; the difficulties caused by the false labelling of imported materials and products and the dumping of Turkish acrylic yarn; and the continuing concentration of production to maximise technical economies of scale, with a consequent reduction in jobs.

The consultants also point out that textiles and clothing are more than twice as important, in employment terms, to west Yorkshire than they are to the Community as a whole and more than three times more important than within the other industrial regions examined by the study. The west Yorkshire region was included in the European regional development funds' non-quota textile crisis aid programme, but it is considered that there is increased need for measures which could more directly assist the restructuring of key sectors, if the region is to be able to compete more successfully in the single market.

The hon. Member for Keighley rehearsed arguments that we have advanced in defence of the British textile and clothing industry over many years. He came here in 1979; I had the honour of first coming here in 1974. It was clear then that the industries were in decline. That decline has intensified during the last 10 years. In the city of Bradford, 14,000 people are directly employed in textiles and clothing. The livelihoods of thousands more, and their families, depend upon companies that supply goods and services to the textile and clothing industries.

We are in the depths of a very deep recession. Certainly it looks as bad as anything that we experienced in the early 1980s. Unemployment has risen sharply. The employment figures in the wool textile sector in west Yorkshire show an 18 per cent. fall between 1988 and 1990. Every part of that industry, including combing, woollen spinning and worsted, has had reductions of more than 20 per cent. Production and export are down. The extension of the MFA for at least 17 months, as the hon. Member for Keighley argued, should be only part of an urgent strategy that is vital if the British textile and clothing industries are to survive and if regions such as west Yorkshire which are dependent on those industries are to return to economic prosperity.

I pay tribute to my union, the Transport and General Workers Union, and to its national secretary, Mr. Peter Booth, who has been actively promoting the argument for a strategy for our industries. The cuts in interest rate have been extremely welcome, but we must remember that the average company in west Yorkshire employs 50 people. Such companies are least able to afford to invest in new technology, research and development.

We should also remember that high exchange rates create difficulties for the industries that we represent, particularly as many low-cost producers link their currencies to the dollar, often at artificially low rates. That gives them an extremely competitive edge and often an unfair economic advantage over home producers. We must also consider training. We welcome the initiatives taken by the industry recently, but in Bradford we have the prospect of losing 600 training places in the coming year. That is scandalous, given the difficulties that the United Kingdom will have to face.

I urge the Minister to listen to the points that have been raised in this and many earlier debates. Our constituents who work in textiles and clothing are often mystified about the Government's policy on those vital industries. The Government's view often appears to be grudging. Today, as the hon. Member for Keighley has said, they are

completely isolated. I urge them at least to accept publicly and quickly in the talks immediately after Easter that 17 months must be the minimum. We want the MFA to continue for at least 10 years. We want the rest of the strategy to which I have referred today to be put in place as soon as possible to assist the industry nationally and regionally.

The Government keep saying that their aim is the liberalisation of trade for the benefit of consumers. I remind the Minister that textile workers are also consumers. If one follows the Government's policy to its logical conclusion, the prospect is that the British textile and clothing industry will be wiped out. British consumers will then depend totally on imported textiles and clothing and will become the victims of whatever prices overseas exporters wish to charge. None of us wants that to happen. Our constituents who work in these important industries deserve better.

11.33 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): In supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) and the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), I wish to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to two specific points. The first relates to the education of people going into the knitting industry, which has been seriously affected. The second relates to Chinese imports.

Hinckley college, with its internationally renowned textiles department, is in my constituency. Sadly, there have recently been seven redundancies at that college. That clearly demonstrates the difficulties that local businesses in the area are facing and the specific impact of the high number of imports causing serious problems to which other hon. Members have referred. In the past two years, imports have increased to represent 50 per cent. of the goods available on the market. That increase has brought about the need to reduce staff in one of the key teaching establishments in the industry in the country. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bear that in mind.

My second point concerns imports from China, which were mentioned briefly by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley. When I first had the honour of coming to the House to serve my constituents, in 1987, I chose as the subject of my maiden speech Chinese imports, particularly the importation of cheap Chinese underwear. I told the Minister at the time that it was a critical matter. Yet today we are still facing that problem; if anything, it has got worse. The Chinese knicker market is seriously undermining our industry. In 1990 imports of Chinese knickers surged to 88 million pairs at an average price of only 19p a pair, while United Kingdom production in knitting establishments fell by a forecast 8·7 per cent. to 59 million pairs at an average price of £1·25 a pair. How on earth can we compete?

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that we need the MFA to be extended for 10 years or a replacement agreement which will guarantee a level playing field, as I believe that to be essential.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for incorrectly identifying him when I called him to speak.

11.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on securing this debate on the GATT textiles negotiations. I know that he and many other hon. Members take a close interest in this subject, which is so important for the textiles manufacturers in their constituencies. They have once more made their concern clear this morning. I was particularly impressed by the knowledge of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley about the world trading system and his attack on subsidies and controls in the world. The House is grateful to him.

Let me say at once to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), whom I thank for taking part in the debate, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), that the Government share their interest and concern. We are in no doubt about the importance of securing a satisfactory overall settlement to the Uruguay round and, within that, a satisfactory conclusion to the GATT textiles negotiations and agreement on the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement. I shall return to that in more detail towards the end of my speech. Ministers have frequently made clear their commitment on those points, both in the House and outside.

The House may find it helpful if I outline where matters stand on the round in general. Its precise future is at present uncertain. Although a basis for resumed negotiations has been agreed and President Bush has asked Congress for the necessary two-year extension of the United States' fast-track negotiating authority, Congress has until 1 June to vote on his request. This process of securing extension is at present a matter for the United States but the outcome is of vital interest to us all.

If the round is to survive, it is important that all parties show a commitment to the negotiations. The world trading system urgently needs a non-inflationary boost of the sort that will be brought about by increased trade flows resulting from a successful conclusion of the Uruguay round. We need to preserve the momentum of the substantial progress made at Brussels on a number of issues, not least textiles, and to prevent domestic political issues and bilateral trading pressures from undoing the good work that has been done so far.

For these reasons, the Government believe that the round needs to be concluded quickly. Without an agreement this year, there is a danger that the round will drift, and that hard decisions will be postponed until after the United States elections in 1992. Nowhere is the urgency greater than in textiles. The Government have always made clear their conviction that liberalisation of trade in textiles will be to the benefit of consumers and the United Kingdom economy as a whole. We want to see it brought about in the context of a successful overall conclusion to the Uruguay round. Liberalisation should take place over a transitional period, the length of which must strike the right balance between on the one hand giving industry further time to adjust—I take into account the points made by my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Bradford,West—and on the other hand not delaying unduly the benefits of liberalisation.

The negotiating mandate agreed by all parties at the outset of the Uruguay round set the objective of returning trade in textiles to GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and disciplines. The United Kingdom and the European Community have made it clear that we want commitments from other countries to accept adequate strengthening and to improve market access so as, among other things, to provide fairer conditions for trade in textiles and clothing. Therefore, whilst it is essential that

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the United Kingdom and the EC continue to show themselves committed to ending the MFA, it must be on the basis of a corresponding commitment by all other parties to strengthened rules and disciplines. That is a vital point which, I hope, will reassure my hon. Friend.

Althqugh the GATT ministerial meeting in Brussels last December failed to reach agreement, good progress was made in some areas, including textiles. Had the overall negotiating climate been more favourable, an agreement looked attainable to phase out the MFA over about 10 years. Ideally, we would have preferred a shorter period and others would have preferred a longer one. However, I know that a 10-year phase-out is broadly acceptable to the United Kingdom industry.

A key aspect of those negotiations and one which rightly receives much attention, not least from hon. Members, is the linkage that I have mentioned between progress in phasing out the MFA and in the strengthening of GATT rules and disciplines. Good progress was made here in Brussels as well.

Agreement was emerging on a system to monitor commitments by others to strengthened rules and disciplines and much more open markets; on a new and more workable GATT safeguard mechanism against surges in imports for use once the textiles transitional period was over; and on a specific selective textiles safeguard mechanism for use during the course of the transitional period.

Other prospective benefits to the textiles industry would include specific protection for textiles designs under a trade-related intellectual property agreement, increased access to overseas markets through reductions in the high tariff and other trade barriers operated by many of our competitors—a point mentioned today—and more satisfactory rules governing unfair trade practices such as dumping and subsidies. I know that hon. Members and the United Kingdom industry share our determination to secure improvements in all those areas.

As to the immediate future, the quota restrictions under the MFA expire at the end of this year but the protocol itself, which gives the MFA legal force, expires in July. Had the round concluded last December, as planned, there was a good prospect of agreement by all to a five-month extension, so that in January 1992 we could have moved smoothly into the transitional period over which the MFA would be phased out. But with the lack of an agreement at Brussels, this timetable now seems much less secure.

Hon. Members have made clear the uncertainty this causes. We understand industry's and trader's concern, and we wish to avoid a legal vacuum pending the conclusion of the Uruguay round. Other member states and other GATT parties which import and export, share our view. All parties are now giving thought to the question of extending the MFA pending a settlement of the Uruguay round.

However, apart from a common desire to avoid uncertainty and a legal vacuum, the interests of the participants in the negotiations are, of course, as one might imagine, fairly diverse. It is therefore not possible yet to be certain of the terms on which any extension might be agreed, or its duration, but we shall push for interim arrangements to be agreed in good time before the MFA expires.

As to the key point, the length of the extension, a range of possibilities is currently being canvassed amongst GATT members. At one end of the spectrum, the United States—with little or no support, as has been mentioned today—favours a 29-month extension, to December 1993. At the other end of the spectrum, we and some of our EC partners—Germany and the Netherlands—can see merit in a five-month extension. This would be consistent with our target of concluding the round as fast as possible while leaving open the possibility of a further 12-month extension thereafter if progress were to prove slower than we hoped. Some other EC and GATT members are in favour of the middle ground—a one-step extension of 17 months, to the end of next year.

As yet, no agreement on the point has emerged within the EC itself. However, the Commission, as a lead negotiator, has requested a degree of flexibility, not least because the supplying countries have yet to give their views and are unlikely to do so before mid-May. The Government recognise that there may be a need for flexibility. We shall continue to discuss the issues with our EC partners, looking for a balance to be struck between providing a reasonable period of certainty for the industry and traders, while not sending a pessimistic signal about the speed at which the round as a whole can be brought to a successful conclusion.

I hope that what I have said today strikes a reasonable balance and will satisfy hon. Members.

Royal Assent

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991.

Rochdale Social Services Department

11.46 am

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I wish to assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Minister from the outset that my sole purpose in raising the subject of the alleged satanic abuse case on the Langley estate in my constituency is not to rake over the dying embers of an unfortunate and tragic case, to apportion blame or to criticise agencies involved in the case. That has already been done by higher authorities. It is my wish to learn from those tragic mistakes in an effort to seek solutions that could prevent anything similar ever happening again to parents and children in the United Kingdom.

It is important to remember that those who have a responsibility to protect children at risk, such as social workers, health visitors, the police and doctors, have in the past been criticised for failure to act in sufficient time to take adequate steps to protect children who are in danger. It is sometimes difficult to tread the line between taking action too soon and not taking it soon enough to protect the children. Effective child protection depends on the skill of professional staff in all the relevant disciplines. To understand the problems that beset the professional staff in the social services department in Rochdale, it is necessary to know the background to this tragic case.

In November 1989, teachers at a school on the Langley estate in Middleton drew the attention of social workers to the disturbed, withdrawn and strange behaviour of a six-year-old boy. He talked to teachers about ghosts and a ghost family who were part of his life. The social workers to whom the case was referred were so concerned about the boy's behaviour and the strange stories that further investigation was made of the family background. That revealed that the boy's father had spoken of ghosts in his previous home. The social workers therefore took the boy, his 11-year-old sister and two other boys into care and made them wards of court. The parents were denied access to the children.

Altogether, a total of 20 children on the estate were taken into care because of their association with the original family. They were taken after dawn swoops by police and social workers. The social workers were convinced that they had unearthed a ritual abuse group on the estate. On 14 September 1990, a special meeting of the social services committee in Rochdale supported the action of the director of social services and invited the Secretary of State for Social Services to ask the social services inspectorate to confirm that all the council's policies and procedures on child abuse were in accordance with Government guidance.

The inspectorate reviewed a sample of 30 cases—none connected with the ones in court. It found fault with some of the department's procedures, which Rochdale social services committee promised to rectify—it is now carrying out that promise. The inspectorate also noted that the local authority had been community charge-capped in 1990 and its budget reduced by £8 million. Accordingly, the council had asked the social services committee to make proposals for saving of £1·9 million from its current budget. A sum of £550,000 had been proposed as a target saving on staffing, with a freeze on staff recruitment. I believe that that proposal should be deeply regretted.

When the case was heard in court earlier this year by Mr. Justice Douglas Brown, he enabled the public to learn

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the facts of the case. By working carefully through the facts he gave a clear, sober account of an extraordinary chain of events.

Mr. Justice Douglas Brown found that the accusations of ritual abuse were unproven, that there was no evidence of drugs connected with any abuse and no evidence that anyone was missing, mutilated or murdered. He emphasised that the staff of the Rochdale social services department were decent people, not heartless or ruthless, who had acted throughout with the children's best interests at heart. However, they had made mistakes, and criticisms were justified.

The judge said that the social workers were obsessive and mistaken in their belief that a six-year-old boy's ghostly fantasies were real. He accused the social workers of serious errors of judgment because they based their decision almost entirely on the evidence of a disturbed boy who had been fed on a rich diet of utterly frightening and unsuitable videos, such as "Nightmare on Elm Street" and "The Evil Dead".

The judge criticised the dawn raids by police and social workers who removed children from their homes and families, which caused the children to be distressed and frightened. He also criticised the procedures employed by police and social workers in their video interview policies. He said that social workers should have carried out the recommendations made by Lord Justice Butler-Sloss following the Cleveland case. Those recommendations had not been carried out and Mr. Justice Douglas Brown recommended that certain lessons could be learnt from the Rochdale case. He recommended:

"There should be intensive training for social workers who have interviewed children on ritual or sexual abuse . . . children should not be removed from their homes in suspected ritual abuse before expert advice is taken."

He recommended that, if children were taken, it should happen at the end of the school day. He also recommended that the affidavits from all parties should be balanced and fair and that all interviews with children in such cases should be videotaped. He criticised the policy of the Greater Manchester police of not videotaping the interviews with the children.

Mr. Gordon Littlemore, an honourable and dedicated man, the then director of social services in Rochdale resigned 24 hours after that judgment, and after praising his staff as

"committed and skilled workers who acted in good faith in what they believed was the best interests of the children".

I believe that Mr. Littlemore is an honourable man of great principle and integrity. He was tragically caught between the demands for the safety of the children, the rights of the parents, unnerving stories of satanic ritual and a lack of adequate financial resources.

Mr. John Pearce, chief executive of Rochdale borough, said that Mr. Littlemore's resignation had been received with deep sorrow and regret. He described Mr. Littlemore as a decent man with principles who had served Rochdale's social services department loyally for over 17 years. Mr. Pearce acknowledged that the authority had made mistakes and that the case was painful and a traumatic experience for all concerned. He said:

"We accept in full what the judge said"

and added that the mistakes would be rectified as soon as possible. I have been informed that all the recommendations of the inspectors and of Mr. Justice Douglas Brown will be implemented as soon as possible by the Rochdale authority and that an assistant director for families will be appointed by the authority.

Mr. Pearce also said that the social services inspectorate had offered to study the report with senior officers of the department of social services to identify and rectify any deficiencies of procedure and practice to ensure that appropriate action was taken and to tackle issues concerning parents' rights. I believe that the law was equally incompetent, both in the length of the process and in the initial draconian order, in denying the right of parents to visit their children. The problem now is to learn from those mistakes.

The present Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley), said as a Back Bencher in a superb speech on child abuse as early as 26 July 1985:

"There have been errors of judgment and it is essential that lessons be learnt from those."

She went on:

"Rather than simply adding to the sensationalistic and censorious responses to these recent appalling tragedies, for which simplistic solutions are too often proposed and social workers are more often than not used as whipping boys, I should like to redress the balance and see the problem of child abuse in a clearer context".

She went on to describe the parents involved in child abuse cases and said:

"The parents are more likely to be unemployed, and nearly two thirds are in receipt of supplementary benefit . . . There are many . . . stress factors on the families. They include marital discord in virtually half the cases, unemployment, and financial problems".—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1985; Vol. 83, c. 1423-24.]

I could not agree more.

On 9 July 1975, I tried in an Adjournment debate to draw attention to the social problems on the Langley estate, where the present case arose. In April 1990, in another Adjournment debate, I again raised the social problems affecting that estate, which is a Manchester overspill estate of about 4,500 dwellings built in the 1950s and catering for a population of about 25,000 people.

I said in the 1975 debate that the estate was seen as a transit camp, was unrelated to its neighbouring communities and was remote from the Manchester authority to which it belonged. I gave examples of the social problems there and said that any examination of the referrals to the social services department in Rochdale would show that 50 per cent. of them came from Langley and that, generally speaking, 75 per cent. of referrals on child care and family problems came from that estate.

I said:

"Langley is an area of social deprivation with a need for community assistance from central Government funds."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1975; Vol. 895, c. 707.]

However, the social problems on the estate worsened after my debate in 1975, despite my pleas for help. In the 1991 labour census the unemployment figure for men on the estate was 43 per cent. Since then, unemployment has worsened.

On 23 April 1990 I again raised on the Floor of the House the many problems facing Langley estate. I said that more than 1,000 houses built in the 1950s were now bricked and boarded up and that 1,005 other houses were unfit for human habitation because of structural defects. I fought for funds from the Estate Action moneys and lobbied Ministers. I quoted the report of Professor Peter Townsend of Bristol university, entitled "Inner City Deprivation, Premature Deaths" which mentioned the

high death rate on Langley estate. I described Langley as a dream turned into a nightmare with devastating and desperate problems—a lost cause, a vandalised ghetto of sickness and despair.

I am glad to say that, on asking for a second time earlier this year, my prayers were answered. The Government have now agreed to find £13·2 million to repair property on the estate over a period of three years. I congratulate them on giving that cash. However, that is for bricks and building materials only and extra Government money is needed to help eliminate the dreadful social deprivation on the estate. Many children there are living in families who are experiencing extreme poverty. Additional Government resources are needed to meet the recommendations of the social services inspectors report and the judge's finding on the social services department in Rochdale.

I ask the Minister—nay, I beg the Minister—for extra cash to fund Rochdale's social services department to enable it to do its job properly and to develop a support programme for vulnerable children and families in the area. What can be learnt from the Cleveland and Rochdale cases to help social workers elsewhere in the United Kingdom? In 1985, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West said:

"None of us can fail to have powerful professional, political and above all personal reactions when things go wrong."

She urged the then Minister to consider

"the national outrage that is felt when disasters occur and to make every effort to learn from the mistakes".

Social workers are always vulnerable because of widespread variations in practice, and one disaster inevitably results in social workers being pilloried. The hon. Member for Surrey, South-West continued:

"Few people appreciate the complexity of the job that a social worker has to do. Such a worker has to make life and death decisions, he or she has to decide whether or not to place a child on the child abuse register, whether or not to seek a care or supervision order: or whether to go for wardship. The social worker has to decide whether or not the child should be removed from its home or if it should be fostered or adopted, or whether rehabilitation should be attempted." —[*Official Report*, 26 July 1985; Vol. 83, c. 1425-28.]

I could not have put it better. In the light of the Minister's words, spoken so many years ago, it would appear that we require our social workers to have the wisdom of Solomon. Is the Minister convinced that social workers are adequately qualified, trained and experienced and properly paid to do their existing job? If he is not, what will he do to rectify the situation?

Following the Rochdale case, we may ask, what is the impact of videotape on young children? The children in this case watched films such as "Nightmare on Elm Street" and "The Evil Dead" until 1 o'clock in the morning—no wonder they were disturbed. Questions must be asked about parents who allow young children to watch such films. Those films are disturbing, sadistic and full of horror. Bringing the cinema into the home has heralded the end of the automatic protection of children from unsuitable material. Has not the time come when the Minister or the Government should seriously consider whether films whose raison d'etre is violence should be passed by the British Board of Film Classification for release as videotapes?

Ritual and satanic abuse first gained media attention following the imprisonment of nine adults in Nottingham in February 1989, who pleaded guilty to 53 charges of incest, cruelty and indecent assault after 25 children were taken into care. There now appear to be differences between the police and the social services department in Nottingham about whether the children were ritualistically abused.

We now have allegations of ritual abuse of children in Manchester and the Orkneys. Does ritual abuse exist in an organised form in the United Kingdom? If it does not, there must be reassessment of interview techniques and the mechanisms by which children are taken into care. A great deal more needs to be found out about the scale of the problem—if, indeed, such a problem exists. A Government-backed investigation into the extent of ritual or satanic abuse nationally is therefore required.

Just as Cleveland became a catalyst for a serious debate about the prevalence of sexual abuse, so the Rochdale case could launch a serious examination of ritual abuse by Government agencies. The controversy over satanic abuse must not be allowed to continue and become a distraction from the reality of the emotional and physical abuse of some children in which cruelty, neglect, incest and rape take place.

We must continue to learn lessons from the serious cases which arise, as in Cleveland and Rochdale. We must ensure that the law works well. We must produce a much clearer and much more consistent legal framework within which child care practitioners can operate, as strong feelings and human emotions are closely involved. We must make absolutely sure that official guidance is good. We must have sound legal foundations on which we can continue to develop the procedural framework for dealing with child abuse. The time is now appropriate for a much more comprehensive review of that material, to bring the whole lot up to date and to make it as sensible but as direct as possible. In raising those issues, I hope that the Minister will take note of them when drafting the new Children Bill, which is to be published later this year.

12.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) on his speech, which demonstrated his long-standing and keen interest in this subject. He quoted correspondence going back 16 years which showed that he has consistently taken an interest in social work issues in general and, in particular, in those on the Langley estate in his constituency. Those issues are too broadly based to be purely the responsibility of the Department of Health.

The hon. Gentleman obliquely acknowledged the long-standing concern and dedicated interest in this subject of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health. Her experience is unusual for a Minister in that, in social work in general and child care social work in particular, it goes back to before her time in the House. My hon. Friend is detained elsewhere this morning. If she had been here, the debate between her and the hon. Gentleman would have contained an unusually high amount of information. I do not pretend to have the knowledge or experience of my hon. Friend in this field, but I shall seek to answer as well as I can some of the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

I have seen the letter written by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton following the judgment in the wardship case. That letter called for a public inquiry to examine further the lessons to be learnt from the Rochdale experience. However, the Government are not attracted to

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the public inquiry route, broadly because we do not think that at this stage a public inquiry would advance either the understanding of the facts or the application of the lessons from those facts.

A public inquiry is established for two related purposes. First, it inquires into what happens, and therefore its establishment implies a lack of knowledge about the facts. Secondly, it seeks to draw from the facts of experience lessons for the application and development of future policy.

As I have said, there is no longer a serious lack of knowledge about what happened in Rochdale; nor are we short of lessons to be learnt from the facts as we know them. The agenda set by the social services inspectorate report published last autumn and, possibly, by some of the judge's comments in his judgment, and our current understanding of the facts, are sufficient to keep us busy and to ensure that our time is not wasted in learning the lessons of Rochdale and applying them there and elsewhere.

No one looking at the way in which the Government have handled the case since it came to public notice can doubt our commitment to establish the facts, learn from them and apply the lessons as extensively as possible. That commitment is fired and driven by the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, who, as I have said, has great experience and a deep understanding of the subject.

The hon. Gentleman quoted from a speech made by my hon. Friend in 1985. That speech made manifest her understanding of the subject, and in it she laid down the guiding priority for any discussion on the matter. It was that we must not fall into the trap of sensationalising what happens, which is the practice of the tabloid press. We must conduct a calm and deliberate investigation, apply the lessons and try to ensure that people do not repeat the mistakes of the past. It is fitting that it should be my hon. Friend the Minister for Health who has responsibility for implementing the Children Act 1989, which grew at least in part from the experiences in Cleveland, in which the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) was significantly involved.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton asked me to comment on the lessons that we have to learn and on the application of resources for the training of social workers. I shall say something about that particularly in the context of Rochdale because there is no doubt about its importance there, and action has already been taken. The child care training support programme which began in 1989 and which is 70 per cent. grant-aided by central Government, is a reflection of the importance that we attach to training social workers in general, and in particular those in child care.

The Department has allocated a grant of £51,000 to the Rochdale social services department for the training of social workers working with families. The Rochdale department proposes to spend £158,000 a year as part of that programme. The programme includes £22,730 for training staff in child protection work, including sexual abuse, and the balance will go to general child care training. The 1991-92 programme envisages expenditure of £137,000, including £35,000 for training staff in the provisions of the Children Act. The Department has also made a grant of nearly £84,000 towards that expenditure. The programme will benefit 919 staff in general child care training, and 718 staff will receive training specifically under the Children Act programme.

I hope that that information will help to answer the hon. Gentleman's proper question about what we are doing to train social workers. He is legitimately anxious that there should be proper training and that the lessons from Cleveland and Rochdale are learnt not only in those areas but in other social services departments. That training programme is part of our commitment.

Mr. Callaghan: I thank the Minister for his information about the cash that is to be allocated to Rochdale. However, how much will be given to the training of social workers nationally?

Mr. Dorrell: I can give the hon. Gentleman the quantum of our training commitment since the establishment of the child care training support programme. The Government announced the scheme on 6 July 1988 and the making of a grant in 1989-90 of £7 million in support of £10 million for the training of social services staff involved in child care. Therefore, the Government's commitment was 70 per cent. direct support to a £10 million national programme for training of social workers in this sector for the year 1989-90. I do not have the most up-to-date figures at my disposal, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with a figure when I get back to the Department. That will not be immediately, because I have three speeches to make in the Adjournment debates.

The hon. Gentleman asked about ritual and organised abuse and whether the Government are taking steps to deepen our understanding of this particularly unpleasant subject, which must cause concern to all of us whenever we read about it, whether the account is sensationalised or in the dullest of prose. Investigation is directed at cases of child abuse, whether perpetrated by one person or a network of abusers. One investigates the fact of child abuse, not whether there is a network leading to it. The Department has been made aware of a number of child sexual abuse networks, which have been successfully investigated by local social service departments and the police.

There has been no investigation of satanism per se. If any child were abused as part of a satanic ritual, that would be illegal—but nowhere in our criminal law is there a ban on the concept, if that is the right word, of satanism. The social services inspectorate has held meetings with representatives of the NSPCC, the Children's Society, Childline and other field agencies to hear of recent investigations into organised abuse, to gather intelligence and to explore the issues involved. It became clear that there was a need to obtain more information about child abuse networks, organised abuse and ritual abuse before guidelines could be produced.

The inspectorate is continuing closely to monitor the position and the Department is conscious of the need to assess the scale and nature of the abuse, which may involve some ritualistic element, so that it can offer informed guidance. We do not hold any figures that give a clear picture of the percentage of children involved in organised abuse, compared with child abuse as a whole. However, evidence to date suggests that it is only a small percentage of the total quantum of the child abuse problem.

The Department intends to commission an eminent academic to conduct research into the extent and nature of ritual and satanic abuse. It aims to produce guidance on organised abuse in the revised version of "Working Together", which the Department intends to publish to coincide with the implementation of the Children Act 1989 in the autumn. I hope that that makes it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we take the matter seriously. However, that does not detract from the proposition that it is the fact of child abuse that should motivate our inquiries, not an unpleasant concern about some network. It is the abuse which is the problem, and it is the abuse which must be our prime concern.

I want to detail some of the lessons that have already been learnt from the Rochdale experience, and some of the steps that the Department has taken to ensure that those lessons are widely learnt and understood. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State commissioned an investigation by the inspectorate, which was published last autumn. It made 42 recommendations aimed at the Rochdale social services department and agencies responsible for child protection.

The key findings of the report were, first, that the area child protection committee procedures predated "Working Together" and were therefore deficient in a number of ways. The Department of Health published "Working Together" in 1988. It sets out recommendations for arrangements for inter-agency co-operation for the protection of children from abuse. Clearly, it does not make sense if the procedures adopted by area child protection committees are not consistent with the guidelines contained in that document. Following Rochdale's experience, one of the key priorities must be to ensure that its procedures are reformed and brought up to date, to reflect the guidance on the way in which agencies should co-operate in dealing with the problem.

The second major finding of the report was that an unacceptable number of case conferences were delayed and were ineffective because they were not effectively chaired. Abused children and those suspected of being abused were automatically placed on the child protection register, whether or not they were still at risk. There was an absence of clear action plans.

The minutiae of administration were ineffective in identifying the problems, prioritising which problems were the most urgent, and ensuring that proper steps were taken to identify and to follow up clear problems.

The third major finding was that comprehensive assessments and plans could not be clearly identified and there was no rigorous policy of involving parents and children in assessment or case conferences. However, some examples of good practice were found in that area.

Fourthly, it was found that good training existed between police and social service staff, but there was an urgent need for a review by the area child protection committee of arrangements for collaboration. Fifthly, it was found that there had been a lack of action by the area child protection committee to ensure that its policies had been implemented and to monitor the consequences on practice.

The social services inspectorate report looked at 30 cases which were then current in Rochdale, but clearly could not look at the cases that were the subject of the wardship hearings which were then sub judice. It was reassuring that the inspectors found that, in all the cases that they studied, appropriate action had been taken to safeguard the children, which must always be the first goal of child protection work.

Following the receipt of the report, the area child protection committee responded with a positive and comprehensive action plan, with a time scale attached, to put into effect the recommendations produced by the inspectorate. I have a list of the steps that have been taken by the Rochdale social services committee to apply the 42 major recommendations of the social services inspectorate to ensure that the lessons are learned and to prevent such things happening again.

It is fair to add that the implementation of the Children Act 1989 with its revised procedures makes it difficult to see how precisely the same circumstances that occurred in Rochdale could recur. That is not to say that one could not end up in the same place by a different route, but the precise set of cause and effect circumstances that led to the unhappy saga of Rochdale are unlikely to recur under the new procedures when the Children Act is fully implemented in the autumn.

Earlier this month, Mr. Justice Brown handed down his decisions in the wardship hearings on the 20 children from the Langley estate. The judge was critical of aspects of procedure and practice by the social work department. The Department of Health wishes to study the transcript of the judge's statement to identify any deficiencies in procedure and practice that were not covered in the social services inspectorate's report that was published in November 1990.

Following the legitimate public concern in Rochdale, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken steps, to ensure that the social services inspectorate investigated what had happened in Rochdale, and has received that report and welcomed the fact that Rochdale council has committed itself to implement the report's 42 recommendations. Now, clearly, we need to study the judgment handed down by Mr. Justice Brown to ensure that we learn from any further lessons of the Rochdale experience.

As the hon. Gentleman said, following the comments and criticisms in the wardship hearings, Mr. Littlemore tendered his resignation as the director of social services at Rochdale. Mr. Ian Davey, previously operational assistant director responsible for children's services in the period covered by the judgment, has been appointed acting director. It is expected that the substantive post of director will be advertised in the next few months.

A major feature of the case that has caused public disquiet is the way that the courts kept children away from their families at the social services department's request without access. The loss of public wardship may result in magistrates being more ready to query refused access in those cases where eventual return to parents seems probable. Parents will have the right to challenge the making of an emergency protection order, and the courts will have to take account of the child's wishes. The local authority will have a duty to return a child looked after by it to his family home unless that is clearly against the child's interests. The authority also has a duty to ensure that children it is looking after and who are away from home have contact with their parents wherever humanly possible.

I hope that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton will feel that the Government have demonstrated a determination to find out the facts, to learn from

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them and to apply the lessons wherever the curse of child abuse—something which any civilised person finds it impossible to imagine—is discovered and that the child is protected from abuse wherever humanly possible. That is a shared imperative.

Human Organs (Transplants and Supply)

12.30 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I am glad to have this opportunity to speak about the transplant programme and the availability of organs. Perhaps I should start by declaring an interest. Last October, I was the recipient of a kidney transplant and, after a slightly shaky start, it is now working well and has transformed the life that I lived on dialysis, as I was told it would, and returned me to near normality.

I am grateful to Professor Peter Morris and all the transplant team at the Churchill hospital in Oxford for the marvellous way that they looked after me. They are a great credit to the national health service.

Transplantation has been described as the gift of life, and that is true in so many ways, especially for people with heart, lung, liver and pancreas problems. Unlike the kidney patient who always has dialysis, they have no fall-back position, so transplantation can make the difference between life and death. And it will do more: it will have a huge and beneficial effect on the quality of their life and that of their families. It will re-create a normal home existence and make possible a return to employment, with all the benefits that that brings.

For kidney patients, transplantation is much cheaper than kidney dialysis, and when a transplant patient goes back to work the state benefits as a result of the taxes that he or she pays because of that employment.

People who are fortunate enough to have had a successful organ transplant, like myself, are bound to feel the greatest sympathy for those on the waiting list. It is on their plight that I want to focus my remarks today, for, as transplantation becomes ever more successful, more people will seek its help and waiting listes are likely to lengthen. There is an over-simplified belief that, if we can find a new way to encourage would-be donors to come forward, we could eliminate the present waiting lists at a stroke and maintain a transplant service thereafter that was roughly in balance between supply and demand.

Some people talk of an opting-out scheme, in which the organs would be taken on death unless the donor had said no before he died. I do not like that idea, because it destroys the idea of organ donation as a gift, voluntarily given. Others have pressed for required requests or required referrals. I do not think that either suggestion is enforceable.

I believe that we shall have to continue to look to intensive therapy units as the main source for organs. Recently, I tabled to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary a question about retrieval rates in intensive therapy units. In reply he said that, in 1989, just over 1,000 patients died every month in intensive therapy units, and that 8·4 per cent. of them were considered potential cadaveric organ donors on the basis that they were confirmed brain-stem dead and there were no general medical contra-indications to organ donation. That rate of 8·4 per cent. per 1,000 patients means 84 organ donors per 1,000, or just over 1,000 organ donors a year. For kidney patients, that should mean transplant opportunities for 2,000 persons. Bearing in mind that there were 3,931 people on the kidney transplant waiting list last Friday, supply is clearly meeting approximately half the demand. If we are to meet it in toto,

kidney donor numbers must be increased by at least 1,000 a year. In other words, the number of cadaveric organ donors coming from the ITUs must be doubled.

Can that be done, and are there any other untapped organ sources? Certainly studies suggest that some cerebro-vascular patients who die in general wards could be organ donors, and that, if that method were replicated nationally, a further 16·7 donors per million per year could be added to the current United Kingdom rate of 14·6 donors per million per year. Obviously, that would be a valuable addition; perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me how those studies are being transferred into practice.

The kidney waiting list of 3,931 must be broken down into patients who are not sensitised to transplants—that is, those who have not yet had a transplant—and those who are sensitised, perhaps because they have had a failed transplant. Some 35 per cent. of the waiting list consists of unsensitised patients. Perhaps they, like me, will not have to wait very long to obtain a transplant; I had to wait only six weeks after being approved for the waiting list. Those who are sensitised will inevitably have to wait much longer, because for them the right kidney will take some time to appear.

The questions that remain are where we are to find the additional donors, and whether the ITUs are producing the maximum possible number. They are, I think, the principal source for the foreseeable future. Everyone whom I have consulted agrees that success in finding donors rests on the enthusiasm of the transplant team, and on the sensitivity and effectiveness of the transplant co-ordinators. Theirs is a stressful job, because it involves both arranging for the organs to be taken by the individual surgical teams and seeing, talking to and winning the confidence of the next of kin, without whose consent the donation cannot be made.

In the Oxford region—the region that I know best—there are two to three co-ordinators to the 2·8 million people who are served by the region. It is felt that more co-ordinators would produce more organs, not necessarily in Oxford but in the regions that have fewer co-ordinators. What steps is the Department taking to increase the number of co-ordinators—or is that strictly a matter for the region?

As we know, 30 per cent. of those who are asked to consent to the removal of organs say no. Although many probably have strong religious and ethical grounds for their refusal, it is widely believed that the doctors who make the initial approach to the next of kin would benefit from bereavement counselling before performing that task. As theirs is the first approach, it is clearly of the greatest importance. Is such counselling now becoming standard practice throughout the regions of the health service? If not, why not?

That initial approach is followed by the work of the co-ordinators, to whom I have already referred. We also know that 5 per cent. of the next of kin are never approached about organ donations, probably because the ITU where the donor has originated is not sufficiently motivated, or perhaps because it lacks the facilities to care for a donor—electric ventilation machinery, and other such equipment. Can the Minister enumerate the ITUs that currently cannot handle organ donations because of a lack of facilities? What steps are being taken to bring them up to date?

I was glad to learn recently from the United Kingdom transplant service that every health region is both an exporter and an importer of organs. That is to say, they are providing organs for other regions, as well as bringing in organs to meet their own needs. I was not surprised to hear that Oxford is at the top of the list. Last year it had 96 exports and 61 imports. I was disappointed to hear that a group of London hospitals was at the bottom of the list, with eight exports and 37 imports.

One must wonder why there is such a disparity, whether the Department is taking steps to find out why such disparities exist, and what can be done to produce a more general and even flow between the regions, and why, in 1989, Euro-transplant retrieved more kidneys per million of population than we did and why Austria in particular acquired 52 kidneys per million of population against our figure of 31·7. What magic do the Austrians have that we do not possess? What can be done to improve our retrieval rate? If we could match the Austrian figure, the waiting list would largely disappear.

Recently I was asked why, when a transplant case receives favourable publicity, organ availability increases. The answer seems to be that next of kin—those who give their consent, or otherwise, to organ donation—temporarily become more sympathetic to the idea. That suggests to me the need for still more education and a rather higher publicity profile than has been the case with organ transplantation.

I welcome the fact that this year there is to be a national transplant week. I hope that the Department will use the opportunity to highlight the remarkable success of the United Kingdom's transplant programme to date. I hope also that schools will join in and include, perhaps, a reference to transplantation in biology lessons so that young people, like their families, will talk about transplantation among themselves and see it as the gift of life that it is—a gift that they may wish to have one day, a gift that, sadly, they may want to give. I hope that live donor transplants, although likely to be small in number, will increase, where appropriate.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of increasing organ donations, particularly if we are to bring in people of 65 and over for transplants. I hope that I have suggested some possible ways that could help to improve the supply of organs. I take comfort from a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* that describes the problem in America. For once, their problem is worse than ours. Now they are even considering payment of the funeral costs of organ donors as an inducement to donation. I very much hope that we do not have to go down that road. I shall listen with great interest to my hon. Friend's reply.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that I think I should speak for the whole House, if the whole House were here, if I said that there can be few more popular testimonies to the success of the transplant programme than my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson). He was an object lesson in courage to all of us during the time that he suffered from kidney problems. It is pleasant to see him looking more tanned and healthy than we have seen him

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for several years. He is, as he said, a walking example of the scientific advance represented by the organ transplant programme.

I echo almost every aspect of my hon. Friend's approach to the problem. My hon. Friend began by saying, rightly, that the transplant programme is one of the great success stories of modern medicine and that it is a particular success story of the British national health service. My first memory of the transplant programme is of flickering black and white television photographs from the Groote Schuur hospital in 1969, when Professor Christiaan Barnard carried out the first heart transplant.

When I became Under-Secretary of State for Health last year, my knowledge of medical advances was such that, while I understood that we had come some way since those days, I had no conception of the extent to which organ transplantation is now a routine operation in the national health service. It is done every day and thousands of patients throughout the country now leading normal lives are testimony to its success.

I shall briefly weary the House with some statistics as that is the best way to illustrate the size and importance of the transplanting programme. The number of kidney transplants performed in Britain has risen from 849 in 1978 to 1,732 in 1989—an increase of more than 100 per cent. in 11 years. More directly relevant to the Christiaan Barnard precedent, 295 hearts were transplanted in 1989, compared with only three in 1979. I shall not seek to calculate that figure in percentage terms, but nearly 300 heart transplants were carried out as routine operations within the national health service. In 1989, there were 295 liver transplants and 94 heart-lung transplants. In 1980, 3,145 people in Britain had functioning transplanted kidneys. By 1988, the figure had risen to 8,000 people, and it has continued to rise since. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury, those people lead virtually normal lives as a result of that great scientific advance.

My hon. Friend was also right to nail one bugbear or misunderstanding of the transplantation programme when he drew attention to the fact that, at least in regard to kidney patients, transplantation is not high-tech medicine which is diverting the resources of the health service away from patients elsewhere in the service. It is more economic than other lower-tech services because, once a successful kidney transplant has been carried out, the health service is no longer committed to the extremely expensive and, from the patient's point of view, dramatically less satisfactory procedures related to various forms of dialysis. That is not to say that dialysis itself is not an advance and that advances have not been made within dialysis, but no one with any understanding of the economics or the quality arguments about the treatment of kidney patients can be under any doubt about the value attached to successful kidney transplantation and the benefits which that scientific advance has brought to patients through the NHS.

It is worth remembering that it is a medical advance available throughout the world, but our record in Britain stands comparison with that of any other country in Europe. We have more kidney transplant patients now alive than any other country in Europe.

The NHS has helped to develop and taken full advantage of the significant developments in transplant technology over the past decade, including improved drug treatment to prevent the rejection of organs. In view of some of the issues that were the main burden of my hon. Friend's speech, clearly reducing the rejection of organs makes a vital contribution to cutting waiting lists and to the effective use of donated organs. We have also been able to improve methods of preserving organs, which also increases the number of organs available.

It is a major success story, but, as my hon. Friend quite rightly pointed out, there are still more people on the waiting lists for transplant operations than many of us would like. Unlike most other waiting lists in the health service, this list is not determined by the pace at which resources can be made available; it is not a resources-determined waiting list but one which exists, by and large, because of the lack of donors. Each of us can do something about cutting the list by ensuring that, if anything untoward happens to us, our family and friends know that we want our organs to be made available to others. We would all have the opportunity to help cut the list if a tragedy should occur.

I shall now deal with the question how to increase the flow of organ availability because, as my hon. Friend said and as I have also stressed, that is the key to cutting the waiting list and to helping those on NHS waiting lists to benefit from this major advance in health. I entirely agree with the philosophy expounded by my hon. Friend about the way in which we should approach the subject.

We must accept that nobody has a right to anybody else's organs. If something untoward happens, our organs may be of value to someone else but that should be the result of an altruistic decision about how we want our bodies to be used when we die. It should not be as a result of a right of the recipient. We must make that philosophical approach clear and accept it as the basis on which we encourage organ donorship. It is our responsibility to make such a decision and to ensure that our friends and relatives are aware of our views. It is the responsibility of the living whose organs may be of use to someone else; it is not anyone else's job to claim the organs.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is not a decision from which we should be required to opt out. It should be a positive decision that, when we die, we want our organs to be available to someone else. It is up to the individual to make his decision known. Furthermore, we should not make much progress if we imposed a statutory requirement on the professional people present at a bereavement to make a request for organs in conditions which they do not believe they can handle or which are unlikely to produce a positive result. It would make the law an ass to require them to make a request which they believed as professionals, to be inappropriate. The law would be absurd. I do not support the principle of requiring someone to opt out of, as it were, organ harvest; nor do I believe that we shall make progress by imposing a statutory obligation on professional people to make such request in the circumstances that I have described.

We must find a way of eliminating the barriers to donorship which exist partly as a result of inadequate professional training but, perhaps pre-eminently, as a result of a misunderstanding by the majority of NHS patients and by society as a whole of what organ donorship means and the circumstances in which organs

can be taken from a dead or dying donor. I must correct that. The issue of donorship may arise when the patient is dying, but those organs are taken when the patient is dead.

It is important to consider how to encourage organ donorship. My hon. Friend concentrated on the number of people who die in intensive therapy units whose organs could be of value to the transplant programme but who do not donate them. We have set up a national audit system to try to establish precisely how many people die in those units without their organs being available for transplant and why. This is an important matter, and we are seeking to inform ourselves not only of the number of missed opportunities as a result of that phenomenon but how we can ensure that that flow of organs improves. My hon. Friend is right in believing that that is the most effective way in which to conduct discussions on the issue.

It is also important to consider the motivation of the intensive therapy units. The professional staff are emotionally involved in attempting to save a patient's life. When a patient dies, the staff often suffer the same feelings of bereavement as the family. Such deaths are demotivating and demoralising for the staff, but it is important to remind the staff that that death is an opportunity for secondary benefit, however great the primary tragedy. Such motivation must be included in the training of staff.

My hon. Friend will also be aware of the recompense for costs incurred in intensive therapy units when they provide organs for use in another hospital. I assure my hon. Friend that we are addressing that question. We are also considering the training of professional staff so that they are aware of the secondary benefits of the primary tragedy to which I referred. We are also considering training on how to ask the next of kin for the consent which must be given before a dead patient's organs are taken.

My hon. Friend was right to stress the importance of the transplant co-ordinators and, if I may, I shall write to my hon. Friend on the specific question that he asked about them. They have a key role to play in raising the awareness of the public of the importance of reaching a decision on organ donorship.

We should all face the fact that, without notice, we might find ourselves fighting for our lives in an intensive therapy unit as a result of an accident. That would bring us face to face with the possibility of our death, as well as of the fact that parts of our body may be of value to someone else. In those circumstances, surely it is better to have discussed the matter with our families so that they know our views. It is important that our concerns should have been addressed and allayed before we have to reach a decision on such donorship. The emotionally charged atmosphere of an intensive therapy unit is no occasion to be approaching this issue for the first time.

It is a matter about which, as citizens, we should know our views and be sure that our families know those views so that when the question is asked the answer is automatic. We should be trained, as it were, in knowing what to do in such circumstances. We should be like the parachutist presenting himself at the back door of the aeroplane. He knows what his reaction will be, because he has done it often on the ground. His reaction becomes second nature and automatic.

The most important step we can take is to be sure that the public understand the benefits that can come from transplantation. They must know that the subject requires everyone to make a decision and to be sure that that decision is known to our families. We must also be sure that all of that happens before we find ourselves in an intensive therapy unit having to make the decision for the first time in anger.

Disabled People

1 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): I appreciate this opportunity to raise the important issue of the disabled. Perhaps any debate on this subject should begin with a quotation from "Breaking the Chain," a campaign issue publication by the Spastics Society:

"Because I'm disabled I don't even get a second look when applying for a job, so there is no way that I can get out from under the poverty line. I'm disabled and I live in a society that doesn't recognise the disabled. I can work. I should have that opportunity."

The House has failed to acknowledge the many problems facing Britain's 6 million disabled people. The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 makes it clear that society has historically tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities, causing discrimination to be a serious and pervasive social problem. The Act recognises that such discrimination persists in such critical areas as employment, housing, public accommodation, education, transportation, communications, recreation, health services and access to public services. Many individuals have little or no legal recourse to redress such discrimination.

I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House recognise that, while society denies people with disabilities the opportunity fully to participate in the life of society, much human talent and energy are wasted and that the consequent dependency and non-productivity results in high costs to the nation.

Britain has a poor track record, and it is time that Parliament made it a key subject for debate and legislation. Without a change in public attitude and Government action, the idea to which the Prime Minister subscribes, of a classless society in which opportunity prevails, is so much hot air. The present Prime Minister, when Minister for the disabled, did not rule out the possibility of anti-discrimination legislation.

Because I am anxious to give the Minister ample time in which to reply to the debate—and since hon. Members could site sufficient cases from their constituencies to more than occupy the time available today—I shall give only a few examples of the way in which the disabled suffer in society.

The disabled already have enormous barriers of fear and ignorance to overcome before being able to get a job. According to a recent Government report, the 3 per cent. quota law has been a dramatic failure. The best region is Yorkshire, where, at 1·5 per cent., the take-up rate is half the legal minimum. The worst take-up rate is in the south-east, where, at 0·7 per cent., it is only a quarter of the legal minimum. Lambeth council is one of the few authorities to have made great efforts to live up to the law. It has committed itself to offering jobs only to people with disabilities. Otherwise, the reasons for the extremely low take-up rates seem to relate to ridiculous fears, prejudices and ignorance about the problems of the disabled at work.

Too often, people think of wheelchairs when the word "disabled" is mentioned. Disabilities range from relatively minor impairments, such as epilepsy, to total impairment such as paraplegia. The simple mention of a disability seems to put employers' backs up. They often assume the worst and do not even bother to interview disabled people.

The Centre for Integrated Living in Ripley, Derbyshire operates an employment agency. It had on its books an epileptic, a skilled worker, who was not even considered for a job by a company that thought that his wheelchair could not cope with stairs.

Disabled people should not all be lumped into a vast homogeneous mass. A change in popular attitudes towards disabled people is needed. In turn, that requires the Government to take the lead in introducing comprehensive legislation. They cannot wash their hands of the problem. There is frightening evidence of discrimination in the Government's agency, Remploy, which has the specific job of providing employment for disabled people in sheltered accommodation. According to observers quoted in the publication of Mainstream, an organisation that promotes integrated opportunities for disabled people, disabled people who were interviewed said:

"They want able-bodied people with dandruff. They want fit people for a very hard working job. There are lads down there throwing cardboard into one end of a machine and running to get to the other end before it comes out. They want their pound of flesh at Remploy. It is not top of the pops with me."

Such criticism deserves an inquiry and a decent response. Regrettably, Remploy seems to be a case study in what goes wrong when the Government throw such agencies to the wall for market forces and instruct them to break even. The more such agencies adopt that approach, the less able they will be to do their jobs. The disabled deserve better than that.

Although the evidence of substantial and systematic discrimination against disabled people is overwhelming, it is persistently ignored. Ten years after the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People's report on restrictions on disability, and as we near the end of the United Nations Decade of Disability, there has been monumental inaction.

I am not alone in arguing that the Government are complacent about the burning issue of discrimination against disabled people. Even the Tory-dominated Select Committee on Employment remains unconvinced about the Government's view that no new legislation is needed, at least for employment. The Select Committee agreed that the Government should

"explore urgently the possibility of equal opportunities legislation for the employment of disabled people and report to Parliament on its potential effects and costs to the labour market."

The Government argue that anti-discrimination laws are too complicated to draft and enforce, that they frighten employers and that they are too expensive and bureaucratic. They are so confident of their arguments that they are frightened even to commission reports on the one country that has laws to challenge such nonsense—the United States. Ministers in the United States no doubt used to express the view that the Government regularly trot out—that little action should be taken and that the disabled should wait their turn and the munificence of municipal authorities and businesses. However, the United States Ministers were defeated in the early 1970s when that country first introduced anti-discrimination laws, which have been widely accepted. Indeed, they have been strengthened by the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990.

The House should recognise that the American Act provides a good model for legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people in this country. It details the way in which disadvantage in employment, public services and telecommunications can be rectified.

For instance, all public transport vehicles built after a certain time must have facilities to carry disabled people in comfort, particularly those in wheelchairs. I am sure that in years to come the Government's inaction over the discrimination and disadvantage suffered by disabled people will be seen as one of the great moral scandals of their term, and, to be fair, the terms of other Governments.

The Government should also commission studies on the operation of the law in Germany, where a quota system of 6 per cent. is combined with a punitive levy or tax on those firms that do not comply. Those moneys are then directed to a fund to provide employment opportunities for disabled people. The Government should also commission reports on the operation of the law in Canada and Australia. They should take a leaf from the American book, but they have refused even to study that law. Why?

The Minister cannot continue to play each of the three wise monkeys by himself—see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. It is high time that the Government opened their eyes to the dreadful disadvantage and discrimination suffered by all too many disabled people and set in train a cross-party effort to undermine and reverse it.

1.10 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) and to the Minister for Social Securityy and Disabled People for allowing me a couple of minutes in which to raise two matters which I hope that the Minister will note. I appreciate the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has not had notice of my points, but if he will promise to write to me during the recess, that will do. My hon. Friend spoke about discrimination against the disabled, about employment problems even at Remploy, which was supposed to end such problems, and about anti-discrimination laws.

I wish to refer to allowances and travel. As the Minister remembers, we have crossed swords more than once on social security issues, not least a couple of years ago in the debate on whether to extend attendance allowance to severely disabled babies under two. Although the announcement was made in a statement and the money was not redistributed as well as I should have wished, no one was more pleased than I was to learn that the exclusion was to end from 9 April 1990.

As the Minister remembers, I tabled a new clause on this matter, but there is no need to rehearse that point now. The current edition of "Counter Claim", a Merseyside welfare rights magazine, contains an article which states that Social Security Commissioner Hoolahan ruled against the Department of Social Security adjudication officer under cases CA/380/1990 and CA/381/1990. He declared that it was illegal for the Department to have denied families the attendance allowance of almost £40 a week before 9 April. He ruled that the exclusion of children under two by regulation 6(2)(b) was not a modification but an exclusion and disallowed the appeal by the adjudication officer.

The article stated:

"It's difficult to know how many parents of disabled babies have been deterred from applying for Attendance Allowance because of this unlawful restriction, but when Attendance Allowance was formally extended to cover babies under two, the Government estimated the move would benefit 3,000 families. If this is an annual figure some 45,000 families may have lost up to £75 million at today's prices."

Ex-gratia payments should be awarded in such cases. What is the Department doing to track down those 45,000 families and to make ex gratia payments, not least to the family from Nuneaton who came here a couple of years ago, as the Minister may remember?

The Minister will know Hereward college in Coventry. An article in the *Evening Telegraph* on Tuesday should shock him. I shall let the Minister read it after the debate.

At present, people in wheelchairs who wish to travel by train are placed in the guard's van with the parcels. They have no access to toilets or to food, but they pay exactly the same fare on British Rail as other travellers. It is a scandal that people are treated like luggage. British Rail says that 130 stations have been upgraded to facilitate the disabled. Such upgrading is welcome, but it is proceeding too slowly. Travel facilities from Coventry to London and, indeed, to other parts of the country are a disgrace.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that he will liaise with his colleagues in the Department of Transport and inform me by letter or, better still, by an announcement in the House that this state of affairs will end and that people in wheelchairs will have exactly the same rights of access to public transport as those who are able to walk.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I shall start with a story that might illustrate some of the problems that have been mentioned by the hon. Members for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). A few days ago, I was speaking to a young lady in a wheelchair who told me about an incident that happened when she was setting out on a trip on British Rail with her mother. After a cup of coffee, her mother had gone to buy a newspaper, leaving the young lady sitting in her wheelchair holding an empty coffee cup. A passer-by put 50p in the cup. That shows that many people perceive the disabled as pathetic creatures who are in need of help.

I have been in this job for four years, and I know that the overwhelming majority of disabled people wish to be independent, to be integrated into able-bodied society, and to have opportunities for employment, leisure activities, transportation and so on. For the time being at least, most people take those things for granted. I welcome this debate as another small step in raising awareness about the ambitions of disabled people in our society and about the duty of central and local government and society to enable them to achieve those ambitions.

I am not sure whether the blanket anti-discrimination legislation mentioned by both hon. Gentlemen is the appropriate way to proceed. There is no doubt that we are making progress. A few days ago, I was reminded of my visit to the mid-Cheshire sheltered workshop, which caters for the needs of people with cerebral palsy and mentally handicapped young people. I was told that 12 people from there have been taken on by a local factory and are living independently in flats in the same town as the factory. Anti-discrimination legislation is no magic wand. I understand, although I have not been able to check it, that, although the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 has been passed, no federal funds have been made available to implement it.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East said that we have a bad track record on this matter. I take issue with that. I have travelled widely in the United States and

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

Europe, and I know that we have made steady progress in helping disabled people. It is untrue to say that there has been monumental inaction. Any fair-minded person looking at what has happened to the quality of life for disabled people in the past 10 years would have to admit that substantial progress has been made. For reasons that I shall later outline, the next 10 years will be even more exciting and important in improving the lives of disabled people.

As the House knows, I have direct responsibility only for the benefit system for disabled people. Like my predecessor, now the Prime Minister, and others who have held the job, including the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), the first ever Minister for the Disabled, I have set targets across the whole of Government to encourage and persuade my colleagues to place the needs of disabled people in the forefront of their priorities.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East was right to make employment the first of his concerns. I shall come back to what my colleagues in the Department of Employment are doing about that. My second priority would be access to transport, buildings and homes. The third priority, which in the next 10 years may turn out to be the most important in enabling disabled people to acquire both independence and integration in our society, is the impact of information technology and new technology on their lives.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East talked about babies under two who survive now as they never would have done given the state of medical technology 10 years ago. He gave me a rough ride on that subject in two sittings of the Committees examining two social security Bills. After the second debate, I made it clear that I was not prepared to defend the policy on that any further, so we have amended it. As to the decision by Commissioner Hoolahan, on this issue, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the matter. We are studying the judgment. I think that it is probably not a reflection on the law as it stood before, but I should not want to prejudge more careful consideration of that judgment.

I have a key interest in promoting the interests of all people who suffer from disabilities of one sort or another. I am as anxious as any other hon. Member to ensure that people with disabilities should not be denied their rightful place in society simply because of their disability. Nor would I deny that discrimination exists—of course it does. We have to battle against it, but, rather than legislating, the most constructive and productive way forward is through raising awareness in the community as a whole.

As I have said before, demographic trends over the coming decades mean that fewer 18-year-olds will come on to the job market, with the result that employers will be compelled to look beyond the disability that is all too often their only perception of the disabled person to the abilities that lie behind. Anyone who has the privilege, as I have, of meeting people with disabilities week after week, will be impressed, as I am time after time, by the abilities of disabled people and their determination to use those abilities in the interest of society. I remain convinced that the way to achieve the integration of disabled people into society is to give them, as far as possible, equality of opportunity and to make it easier for them to live, work and engage in social activities along with their able-bodied peers.

In the time remaining in this short debate, I shall concentrate on the practical measures that the Government want to introduce rather than on the concept of generalised anti-discrimination legislation. I start, as did the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East, with employment. My colleagues in the Department of Employment have been giving serious consideration to the need for legislation on employment policy. The issue was addressed, as everyone will be aware, in some detail in the Department's consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", which was published last June. Chapter 5 of that document, a copy of which was placed in the Library, looked at the present arrangements, including the quota system, and considered a number of alternatives.

As hon. Members will be aware, one of the problems with the quota system is that, if every employer ensured that 3 per cent. of his work force comprised registered disabled people, there would not be enough people on the register to go round. We know that many disabled people do not want to hang around their necks the label "registered disabled". Those suffering disability should be in our sights as we seek to improve the employment position for disabled people.

A considerable number of responses to the consultative document have been received. Ministers are considering the issue and will announce their decisions in due course. I have no doubt that some employers' recruitment practices discriminate unfairly against people with disabilities. Indeed, they discriminate unfairly against other groups, such as the elderly and women. Often, an employer discriminates against a disabled person because of ignorance of that person's capabilities, not from ill will. However, it is difficult to assess the scale of the problem.

Some companies implement excellent policies for employing disabled people. Indeed, a number of them have joined together in the Employers Forum on Disability to share experiences and good practice. Some examples of good practice are the Department of Employment's code of good practice—the first in Europe—launched in 1984; the establishment of the Disablement Advisory Service in 1983; the offer of financial help to employers to overcome particular difficulties; and just recently, the introduction of a new symbol for employers—we should not underestimate the importance of symbolic moves—that demonstrates their commitment to good practice. I believe that the appearance of that symbol in advertisements for jobs will help a disabled job seeker, who may be anxious about starting or changing employment, to have confidence that the employer is committed to good practice.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East mentioned transport, which is an immensely emotive subject. The whole concept of putting wheelchair people into a guard's van, along with the livestock and the luggage, is offensive to anyone who thinks about it. We are making progress, and there is a special unit within the Department of Transport that is planning and achieving considerable advances. The Department is working on a prototype of a wheelchair-accessible bus. It hopes that there will be a Europewide standard on a low-level access bus for wheelchair users. London has wheelchair-accessible mobility buses in 11 boroughs. As I think the House is

aware, all new taxis must be accessible to wheelchair users. A number of other local authorities are now also saying that they will license new taxis only if they meet the standard of the new wheelchair-accessible taxis in London.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the problems with British Rail. Mr. Bill Buchanan, who advises on these matters and is himself in a wheelchair, tells me that there is considerable progress in making services and stations more accessible. It is all very well ensuring that trains are wheelchair-accessible, but that is not a great deal of use if the stations are not wheelchair-accessible. All new InterCity trains now have wheelchair places and properly accessible toilets. The real problem with which we must deal is Network SouthEast, whose stock is very old, and it will take some time to replace it. However, we are making steady progress, and I know that the Department of Transport and British Rail are committed to that.

Within Government as a whole, and across the Departments of Employment, Environment, Health, and Social Security, the needs of people with disabilities are receiving considerable weight. The Department of Health has wide-ranging and comprehensive plans for the future of community care, designed to give disabled people a greater say in how they live their lives and greater opportunities for choice and independence. Those are themes which underpin the philosophy of community care, and as they begin to take hold after 1993, they will increasingly help disabled people to become or remain full contributors to our society.

The interests of disabled children will be promoted by the implementation of the Children Act 1989, which integrates local authorities' responsibilities for children with disabilities with those for other children who are in need. One of the Act's key features is its emphasis on the need for the child and its parents to participate in decisions affecting the child.

I end on this note. All the progress that we can make in the area of coping with the needs of people with disabilities will be set at nought unless disabled people can find out what is available. Therefore, both through the European Community Handynet agreement—through which we have given some £275,000 to the Disabled Living Foundation to improve information technology—for services and equipment available to disabled people, and through the national disability information project launched by the Department of Health, we are determined to see that, increasingly, people with disabilities are aware of the services, the equipment and other help that are available to them to enable them to improve the quality of their lives and, progressively, to overcome the discrimination which undoubtedly still exists about their employment.

Papworth Hospital

1.30 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I am proud to have the Papworth hospital within my constituency. It is, as is well known, world famous for heart surgery and treatment. It is long past the research and experimental stage of other transplant surgery and it has a proven track record. It has saved many lives and improved the quality of life for many others.

Papworth hospital is notable for the expertise and the exceptionally high morale of staff at all levels—consultants, doctors, nurses and all ancillary staff—which compares favourably with that at many other hospitals. Above all, and most importantly, patients are delighted with the treatment that they receive there. I do not think that I have met a single patient who has not been full of praise of the way in which he has been treated and the way in which he has recovered from a serious operation at Papworth hospital.

All, whether consultants, staff or patients, have one thing in common—they do not want to move to the equally famous Addenbrooke's hospital, also in my constituency. There are many reasons for that. I will not go into all the details, but they include staffing, parking of vehicles, accommodation for relatives and amenities, particularly for the long-stay patients, and the patients there are necessarily of a long-stay nature compared with those in a district hospital. All those are easier at Papworth than they are in Cambridge. Addenbrooke's, excellent hospital though it is, with some of the highest skills available in the world, is already much too large and ought not to become larger. That is the view I take, and it is the view that the people who work there and the customers take. It is also, I have to say, a view shared by my colleagues in the House who represent the county of Cambridgeshire.

But there is a serious problem, which is the reason why I have sought this Adjournment debate. Papworth has a waiting list of 900, double what it was nine months ago. I am told that patients are having to wait so long that when they are admitted they are already either urgent or emergency cases. Currently, more than 80 per cent. of the patients are thus classified. The remaining 20 per cent. on the waiting list have to wait an average of 11 months. That is not good enough. I am advised by those who know that the maximum waiting time for patients of that nature should be six months and that patients in that category should not make up more than 40 per cent. of the total.

During the last year, Papworth has received letters about the waiting list on behalf of patients from many Members of Parliament, including no less a person than the Prime Minister himself and, significantly, from my hon. Friend the Minister's boss, the Secretary of State for Health, who has had occasion to write to the hospital on behalf of patients who have been waiting too long.

The hospital is working harder than ever and has increased productivity, and there is a record number of operations using the same number of beds. The number of heart specialists has doubled from five to 10. However, despite all that admirable activity and work, the hospital is failing to match demand, which has doubled in 12 months. With new treatments and wider knowledge, there is no likelihood that that demand will diminish for the foreseeable future.

[Sir Anthony Grant]

Bearing that in mind, a new operating theatre will be available in 1992. Indeed, a few months ago I had the privilege of digging the first sod for the work on that splendid new operating theatre. In addition, a second angiography suite will be opened in 1992, thus enabling the workload to double, at a cost of about £3 million to public funds.

However, beds are needed if the new facilities are to be used and the waiting lists eased. The position is rather absurd. The only analogy that I can offer is that it is like a marvellous train standing in a station, with the most expert drivers and crew and a long line of passengers waiting and longing to get on board, but the train is unable to move because there are not enough coaches. It is no solution to tell people that they will have to move to another station: we need extra coaches.

What will the new wing cost?—a substantial amount, £1·5 million. How does one deal with the problem? One could ask the regional health authority, but it already has heavy demands upon its money, added to which it will not make up its mind because it says that the future of Papworth is uncertain. The uncertainty has been created by the regional health authority, in my judgment, because people in my constituency, and I myself, wish that Papworth should stay where it is. That uncertainty, which the regional health authority has not resolved, makes it reluctant to produce the money, even if it had it.

However, there is a simpler solution, which will not cost the regional health authority anything in hard cash, because at least four private companies are prepared to invest in the new wing, at no expense to the public, but they must be certain that they will get a return on their investment. If they could be certain that Papworth hospital would stay where it is for 10 years and that the new wing would be used for that time, they would get a return on their investment. However, if the wing is used for only six or seven years, they will not get an adequate return.

Therefore, we are in a Catch-22 position. The simple solution is for a guarantee to be given that Papworth will either stay as it is for at least 10 years or, in the event of the hospital being moved to Addenbrooke's hospital, the health authority will guarantee repayment to those who invest in the new wing. What are the benefits if that solution is adopted? I can think of three important benefits.

First and foremost, the patient waiting lists for cardiac services will shorten. Secondly, district health authorities will benefit. Papworth is in an excellent authority in the Hunts district which is run very efficiently by its staff—all of whom, from the chairman downwards, are dedicated people whose work I greatly admire. Such authorities will be able to purchase more services by virtue of the new wing, and, what is more, the income from private patients will enable them to do so more cheaply. Thirdly—this should commend itself not only to the Department of Health but to the Treasury—the taxpayer would see the £3 million already spent on the new operating theatre and angiography suite working to optimum capacity rather than its present 50 per cent.

All the arguments point to the solution that I have suggested. I think that it is in the interests of patients, doctors, staff and everyone else who is concerned with this remarkable hospital. I do not expect the Minister to make a decision this afternoon; Ministers cannot be expected to construct policy on the hoof. I merely wish to alert the Government and the public to an important health problem, and—perhaps equally important—to point out that there is a relatively simple solution, if only those in charge will grasp the facts, make a firm decision and remove all uncertainty.

1.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) will forgive me if I begin by saying that I was a little concerned to discover yesterday that I would be answering a debate in which he would be putting the questions. Having witnessed the effectiveness of his questioning of the Opposition yesterday, I did not want to find myself in the same position.

My hon. Friend has not let his constituents down. He has presented a very effective espousal of the case of those concerned about future investment in Papworth hospital, and those who support his solution. As well as highlighting the appealing simplicity of that solution, he has left no stone unturned in his cogent presentation of the arguments.

If my hon. Friend had been present earlier, he would know that only an hour ago I was describing the dramatic advances that we have achieved in the national health service: the expansion of the transplant programme, and the enormous health benefits that the improvements in modern medicine have unleashed. I was replying to a speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), who has benefited from a different kind of transplant from those with which Papworth is primarily concerned—but that transplant is another manifestation of the importance of the programme to which Papworth makes such a distinguished contribution.

As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury, before I became a Health Minister last May my exposure to transplanting in general, and heart transplants in particular, had been that of a layman. I vaguely remembered the flickering black and white television pictures from the Groote Schuur hospital in Capetown in the late 1960s, when Dr. Christiaan Barnard first performed a heart transplant operation. I thought of heart transplantation as a major technical advance that was still very much on the leading edge of technology. I did not think of heart transplants in the context in which they now take place. They are now routine operations in the national health service. Thousands of people who are walking the streets of this country have benefited from the surgery that has been developed to such a high pitch at Papworth hospital. It is one of the major benefits of modern medicine, and it has been provided to the people of this country through the agency of the national health service.

At the beginning of his speech my hon. Friend was keen to put on record the very considerable achievements of his constituents within Papworth hospital and to draw attention to the fact that he has the privilege of representing two hospitals, both of which have international reputations, earned from very successful clinical records and the exploitation of medical advances. Since 1979, the number of heart bypass operations

performed at Papworth hospital has increased by nearly 300 per cent. That is a measure of the advance that has been made possible by modern medicine at Papworth hospital.

The hospital is to receive £250,000 from the East Anglian regional health authority's waiting lists fund to do 70 more bypass operations next year than were previously planned. Apart, therefore, from Papworth hospital having a distinguished track record, it has also received support from the East Anglian regional health authority to deal with the waiting list problem that my hon. Friend identified as one of the managerial issues that the hospital has to face.

Furthermore, as my hon. Friend briefly mentioned, the hospital has also benefited from a significant capital expenditure programme that is currently under way. It is a £2·7 million scheme for a third operating theatre at the hospital, which is due to open in April 1992. No one could argue that Papworth is not a major success story within the national health service, or that its success story has not been reinforced and supported by national health service management in general and the East Anglian regional health authority in particular. Due to its success and reputation, both nationally and internationally, Papworth hospital has received the letters to which my hon. Friend referred from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, both of whom are concerned about constituents who are on the Papworth hospital waiting list because they wish to benefit from the surgery that that hospital can provide.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to the fact that, apart from having to guard myself against the effective questioning of which he has so recently shown himself to be a master, I must ensure that whatever I say will read well in the constituency press both of my immediate boss and of my ultimate boss. In responding, therefore, to my hon. Friend's speech, I have to choose my words extremely carefully.

My hon. Friend argued vigorously that the current waiting list problem at Papworth hospital could most effectively be addressed and reduced by accepting the offer of private capital to provide an additional ward, thus increasing Papworth hospital's capacity. To adopt the metaphor used by my hon. Friend this afternoon and in a recent letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, it would add an extra coach to the train.

Whether the extra ward is funded by the regional health authority or by private capital, the issue clearly needs to be examined to find out whether the additional ward would provide the relatively low marginal cost benefit to patients on the waiting list. I shall certainly ensure that the proposal is carefully examined. If it is true that for the relatively modest expenditure involved in providing an additional ward in the hospital the rest of the resources, not least the £2·7 million new third operating theatre coming on stream in April 1992, could be used more effectively to produce a lower average cost per operation and to treat more patients within the hospital as a result of having an additional ward, that is clearly a powerful argument which those responsible for the routine front-line management of the health service in Cambridgeshire will have to address.

I pause for a second to reflect on the role that private capital could play in the provision of that additional ward space. It is quite explicitly one of the benefits that should flow from the reformed structure of the NHS that comes into effect next Monday and the introduction of the concept of purchaser-provider that we should be more open minded about the employment of privately funded capital stock for the treatment of health service patients.

The burden of my hon. Friend's argument was not only that a relatively small additional investment would yield large benefits for patients if placed at the Papworth hospital, but that the health service need not expect to finance that investment because private capital is available. It makes my hon. Friend's approach that much more attractive, and is a clear and timely illustration of the benefits of an effective and flexibly managed health service from the employment of the principles of purchaser-provider that come into effect next Monday.

Those reforms concentrate the mind on the core activity of the NHS. We must remember that the NHS should not be principally about running hospitals. It exists to provide equal access to health care for patients. It is an enabling mechanism to ensure that access to health care is determined on the basis of clinical need and not ability to pay. If that can best be done by using public funds through the agency of a purchaser district health authority to purchase health care from a privately funded provider, that is an entirely benign result which I am sure every patient on a Papworth waiting list would applaud with vigour.

I pause to reflect upon the significance of my hon. Friend's suggestion and to stress that not only are we open-minded towards it but we embrace the concept of a privately funded facility if the benefit is to enhance the quality of patient care to health service patients waiting for treatment at Papworth hospital. I find that aspect of his argument extremely attractive.

My hon. Friend went on to express concern about what he felt was the potential uncertainty about the future of Papworth hospital. I should like to address that concern directly; it is clearly critical to the viability of the privately funded ward for which my hon. Friend was keen to argue this afternoon. Clearly he is right in believing that we shall not be able to recruit private capital to a hospital when its future is limited to a relatively few years.

I wish to explain in more detail the current position on the future of the hospital. Papworth hospital was built in 1928 as a tuberculosis sanitorium and chest hospital. The surroundings of the hospital are attractive, but the existing capital stock of the hospital is relatively old and fragmented and the running costs for the buildings are relatively high.

The management of the health service believes that for the hospital to remain viable for the practice of high-tech open heart surgery and transplantation a significant rebuilding, expansion and investment programme will be needed to ensure that the buildings in which the high quality clinical care is offered are able to provide the security and conditions in which high-tech medicine can be properly and best offered. Such a programme would also ensure that the buildings were not wasteful in terms of the revenue expenditure which is necessary to keep them operating. It would be crazy to have a high-tech hospital where money that should be spent on high-tech medicine was spent on propping up extremely low-tech buildings.

After some initial appraisal work, the regional health authority invited Huntingdon district health authority in April last year to consult locally on options for the future of Papworth services. Having done so, it asked it to submit its recommendations to the regional health authority for a

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

decision. I can now tell the House that the district health authority expects to issue a document for consultation about the future of Papworth by mid-April. It is currently in draft form and has yet to be formally agreed by the district health authority, but it is likely to include a detailed appraisal of four main options.

The first option is to extend Papworth and upgrade the existing buildings on the Papworth site. The second is to build a replacement building on the site. A third is to provide a new building on the site of Hinchingbrooke hospital in Huntingdon. A fourth—which my hon. Friend was concerned that the House should realise was the subject of significant local opposition—is to construct a new building on the site of Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge. I understand that they are the four options that are likely to be canvassed in an entirely neutral way in the document to be published by the district health authority in a few weeks.

The document will also state what the key criteria against which those options will be assessed should be. First, it is important that the patient has reasonable access to the health care. Secondly, it is important that the environment in the hospital is congenial and appropriate for the offering of the type of health care for which the hospital was designed.

Sir Anthony Grant: Especially long-stay care.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to remind me that it must be appropriate for the offering of relatively long-stay care. I pause slightly over the use of the term "long-stay", because, to a Minister with responsibility for mental health services, it tends to mean something slightly different than it would in the context of cardiothoracic care.

We might deal with the problems of staff recruitment and retention. Furthermore, we must ensure that, whatever form the new Papworth facility takes, it is able to recruit and retain the staff that it needs. We must also consider clinical integration, teaching, research and the relative cost of the different options. We must also seek to ensure that the facilities that we provide are flexible and can expand and contract to meet the demand for the facilities offered in the new hospital and that they do not commit successor generations to a capital stock that they are unable to mould to emerging needs. We must also bear in mind the adjustment cost during the implementation phase of any capital investment programme and ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum in that period.

Those options will be canvassed as a result of the consultation document. Following that, I hope that we shall be able to arrive at a decision about how the excellent health care available at Papworth hospital is ensured for the future. I hope that that decision is reached in an orderly and not excessively time-consuming manner.

The Government and the health service are committed to maintaining intact the infrastructure which is Papworth hospital. The question is how we design our capital investment programme to ensure that that institution and infrastructure is available to the best advantage of patients for the lifetime of the capital investment which we are making in the future of that centre of excellence of British medicine.

Borders Health Board Area

2 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for the opportunity afforded to me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), should he seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to discuss the important question of long-stay care provision in the Borders.

I know that the Minister would prefer to be elsewhere, but I make no apology for asking the House to consider this issue, which is not only important locally, but urgent, because the local area health board published a consultation document "Changes in Health Care Services" at the end of February. It has solicited comments on that document to be returned by 3 April for consideration at the next board meeting on 11 April or at the subsequent meeting on 7 May. One of the important issues behind this debate is the local concern that the time scale over which the decisions are to be considered and the consultation undertaken is far too short. I wonder whether the Minister could say something about that later.

I know that profound changes will be made to the way in which the national health service is structured and financed after 1992, when an internal market is established. I know that that means that some changes must be made, but to what extent is it absolutely necessary to work to the time scale to which the board seems determined to adhere? Is there any scope for flexibility in the time available?

The board's financial circumstances are peculiar to the extent that, in 1989, it completed a substantial capital project—the Borders district general hospital. That work involved £4 million of additional expenditure, a substantial sum given the size of the health board. The Minister will also be aware that, in 1989, the board borrowed £500,000, which it is required to pay back. However, the NHS management executive has also decreed that it should eliminate its deficit by 1992-93. I understand that that requirement has been placed on the other Scottish health boards, but certain circumstances in the Borders argue that special mitigating factors should be taken into account.

If the NHS management executive and the Scottish Office Home and Health Department insist on the board's carrying out those financial cuts within the time stipulated, the task will be too demanding to be undertaken sensibly. The damage that may result could be well in excess of any savings, financial or otherwise, that may be made.

I know that in 1991-92 the board has been allowed a net income of £36·95 million—an increase of £4·45 million on the 1990-91 budget. Much of that money has already been hypothecated to developments insisted upon by central Government, for example Project 2000, the extra money needed for the treatment of AIDS, the junior hospital doctors allocation, as well as money needed to deal with the abolition of Crown immunity.

All those issues, though important, will take a large proportion of the extra money that has been made available to the board. Indeed, the board calculates that it has only about £1 million of new money that is not already committed. Is there any hope for the Borders health board of additional help, in terms of the SHARE formula,

bearing in mind that we have not yet reached parity in money due to that board relative to that given to other boards in Scotland?

Suffice it to say that the board needs to make efficiency savings of £650,000—2 per cent. of its budget—if income and expenditure are to be in balance by the end of March 1992. In addition, it must make efficiency savings of 1 per cent. All that represents an extremely tall order. It seems unreasonable, and the Government should pay more attention to the requirements of some boards.

The Borders health board has been extremely prudent in its expenditure. It has played the game by all the rules set by St. Andrew's house, and in its present hour of need it would be proper for the Scottish Office to look with more sympathy on the claims that the board is making.

The changes that the consultation document proposes, in terms of long-term care and provision in the Borders, mean that there could be a substantial move of long-stay patient care out of NHS provision into the private and voluntary sector. I have nothing against that sector. There are examples in the Borders of exemplary homes, which are run to a high standard by dedicated people.

I have nothing against that sector in principle, but great concern is being expressed lest, if the board's proposals and the ideas in the consultation document are put into practice, there will be difficulty guaranteeing and overseeing the standards of care that long-stay patients now enjoy in the NHS in the Borders. We must not overlook the wishes of patients. If a patient in, for example, a ward in the district general hospital in Galashiels is opposed to having private or voluntary sector care, his or her wishes should be respected.

The professional health care teams are worried lest the result of the changes will be a fragmentation of the multi-disciplinary approach and team work that they have built up over many years. Their efforts have resulted in a high standard of care of geriatric and long-stay patients locally.

There is also concern about the morality, so to speak, of seeking to use Department of Social Security income support payments to support long-stay patients locally. There are 385 private nursing home beds in the Borders, but, by definition, they are provided in an unplanned and incoherent way and are not related to local demands.

There are some important staffing issues involved in all this. There are potential redundancies on a not inconsiderable scale, so the staff are confronted with uncertainty about their future, but to be fair to them, they are less worried about themselves than about the standard of care available to their patients.

In my experience, the staff of the NHS are the service's most valuable asset. Locally in the Borders, they are committed and dedicated people. Their morale is suffering as a result of the changes that are being considered. They are asking why the elderly are carrying the brunt of the cuts. Is it because they are a soft target? They believe that the changes will result in privatisation by the back door, and that is causing them much distress and uncertainty.

I urge the Minister to take an urgent and fresh look at the financial provision available to the Borders health board and the time scale that it is asked to observe. The issues at stake are important, particularly to the patients whom we all seek to serve. I hope that his comments will relieve some of the anxiety felt in the Borders health board.

2.10 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on his initiative in securing this Adjournment debate, even though, like the Minister, I had planned to be elsewhere. I wish to reinforce my hon. Friend's general comments and to outline the way in which the proposals will affect my constituency.

Whereas my hon. Friend spoke of a substantial shift from the public to the private sector in his constituency if the proposals are implemented, such a shift would not take place in my constituency. Rather, national health service provision for long-stay elderly patients would be totally eliminated and replaced by a series of private sector proposals. Is that the Government's intention? If so, I have never understood why, on the one hand, the Government are screwing down the expenditure of all health boards —they call it careful control and budgeting, but it is a constraint on their finances—while, on the other, DSS payments to the private sector for long-stay patients are increasing at an unprecedented rate. I do not understand why the Treasury imposes careful controls in one Ministry while another picks up the tabs and seems to have an open budget. Will the Minister clarify that?

If the proposals are adopted, will patients in the private sector have the same access to NHS facilities, such as physiotherapy and chiropody, as they enjoy at present? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, I pay tribute to the private sector. Indeed, I opened the only purpose-built private nursing home in my constituency, and it is a good one. However, there is no guarantee that, if the private sector suddenly expands into all hospitals, as envisaged in the Borders proposals, the same standards will be maintained. We all know of examples in other parts of the country where the private sector has fallen down.

It would be wrong to suggest that general practitioners in my constituency are totally opposed to the idea of independent community trusts, but they are certainly not enthusiastic about them, for one obvious reason: they would turn GPs into business managers and that is not why they trained for the medical profession. They feel that the Government want to secure care of the elderly on the cheap by turning GPs into business managers and perhaps then paying for staff. The same staff may find employment elsewhere but under worse pay and conditions than they enjoy in the NHS.

The proposals will mean a sudden dislocation of staff and patients. I would welcome the re-opening of the Galashiels and the Selkirk cottage hospitals. They are suitable places for GP beds and for care of the elderly. Indeed, they are more suitable in the long run than the more distant hospital at Huntlyburn. How they are to be reopened—under what authority, control and budget—is extremely important.

A letter from GPs in Galashiels said:

> "The need to abandon the long-established principle of NHS provision for continuing medical care of the elderly in such a precipitate manner to satisfy short-term political/financial expediency seems to us to be difficult to justify. We feel this demand by the Government should be resisted by the Board."

That is important, and I am glad that the Minister now has the opportunity to clarify what lies behind the proposals.

2.14 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for raising this subject, as it allows me to put on record important facts about the funds available to the Borders health board and the interesting and exciting changes proposed for long-stay services.

I hesitate to question what the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said about his constituency, but I understood that Hay Lodge hospital in Peebles was in his constituency. It had 48 beds for long-term care of the elderly, and I do not believe that there are proposals to change that. I was a little puzzled by the right hon. Gentleman's statement that there would be no provision in his constituency.

Sir David Steel: I was referring to Ettrick and Lauderdale.

Mr. Forsyth: The right hon. Gentleman must not forget Peebles.

It should be made clear that Borders health board has sufficient resources to provide excellent services. The board is funded no differently from any other in Scotland. It does not have a persistent financial problem; nor is there any evidence that it is mismanaging the funds allocated to it. For the financial year 1991-92, Borders has been allocated nearly £38 million—an increase of 11·1 per cent. over the previous year's allocation and the highest increase of any health board in Scotland. In real terms, the increase in the revenue allocation mode to Borders health board since 1979-80 has been 63·7 per cent.

What the board has not yet done fully is to adjust the pattern of its services to take into account the opening of Borders general hospital in 1988. The board recognised from the outset that that hospital would be more expensive to run than the facilities that it replaced. That is not surprising, because the new hospital was designed to provide many more facilities locally so that the people of the borders did not have to travel to Edinburgh for relatively routine health care. It was also designed to provide facilities to a much higher standard than the cottage hospitals which it replaced.

Part of the cost of the new hospital was met from closing a number of small hospitals and part was met from adjustments made to the revenue allocations of the Lothian and Borders health boards to reflect the fact that people are now treated locally. In addition, Borders health board stands to benefit from the different arrangements that we are gradually introducing for distributing funds to health boards—it is called moving to share parity and was mentioned by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. However, even taking all those factors into account, Borders health board needed to adjust the pattern of its services to ensure that the new facilities of Borders general hospital were used most appropriately and that in the long term the resources required to operate them were generated by the board.

Another factor to be taken into account is the introduction of the internal market. With effect from this April, health boards, as the hon. Gentleman said, will become the purchasers of services for their community. Their task is to assess the health needs of the populations they serve and to arrange to meet those needs in the most effective—including cost-effective—way by contracting to purchase services from a variety of providers. With effect from April 1992, those contracts will be based on real money. Clearly, for this system to work properly, health boards need to have their incomes and expenditure in balance.

We have therefore told health boards generally that they should aim to have their incomes and expenditure in balance by the end of the 1991-92 financial year. This applies to all health boards and not just Borders. Health boards generally understand and accept the need for this and are working towards putting themselves in that position. Like all other health boards, Borders health board needs to do that.

All that is by way of background to explain that the board's proposals are not a sudden response to an unexpected crisis, but are the next logical step in a long-term pattern of adjustments to services to take into account what is required and what is now available.

Three principles underlie the proposals of Borders health board. The first is that its facilities should be used in the most appropriate fashion—in other words, Borders general hospital should not be used to provide long-stay care for the elderly.

Secondly, associated specialties should be located together so far as is possible. An example of that is the desirability of bringing psycho-geriatric assessment facilities into the Borders general hospital alongside the existing geriatric assessment facilities. Finally, it is also important that long-stay care facilities for the elderly and for psycho-geriatric patients should be provided as close as possible to the local communities. Borders health board has a long tradition in the field of mental handicap of providing local facilities rather than institutional care, and that needs to be continued and developed.

Therefore, the board proposes to create long-stay accommodation for psycho-geriatric patients in Kelso by upgrading Kelso cottage hospital and transferring general practitioner beds from there to the Inch hospital in Kelso. It also proposes to recreate long-stay accommodation for the elderly in Selkirk and Galashiels. This would fulfil the commitment that the board gave some time ago to reopen these facilities. It also provides an opportunity to transfer long-stay accommodation for the elderly from Borders general hospital, where it is inappropriately located, to local communities. This in turn offers an opportunity to use more effectively the accommodation at Borders general hospital.

The board has a variety of proposals in mind for this. First, it is considering transferring the psycho-geriatric assessment facilities, which are currently housed in poor-quality accommodation at Dingleton hospital, to the Borders general hospital. That would mean that all the board's geriatric and psycho-geriatric assessment facilities were located alongside one another. This is a much better pattern of provision and one which I think would be generally welcomed. The board is also considering an expansion of ophthalmology at Borders general hospital, which is one of its major priorities and which would consolidate and improve on the progress that the board has already made in reducing waiting lists for this specialty. To bring about these changes, the board plans capital investment at Kelso cottage hospital, at Inch hospital and probably also at Galashiels.

The board's consultation document rightly recognises that its role for the future is to assess the needs of its population and to purchase the best pattern of care to

meet those needs. However, the facilities that the board secures for its population do not need to be owned or managed by the board itself. That is particularly true in the case of care for the elderly, where there is often a fairly even balance between the need for medical care and the need for social care.

Therefore, I welcome the fact that the board's consultation document proposes the establishment of local trusts in a variety of areas. The trusts would be voluntary bodies, which would operate under the terms of the Registered Nursing Homes Act 1938. The board would be responsible for registering and inspecting the facilities provided by the trusts and would by that means, and through the contracts which it would negotiate, be able to specify the standards of care which it requires and to monitor that they are being achieved in practice.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am listening carefully to the Minister, and there is much substance in what he says. However, model trusts offering voluntary or private sector care will take a long time to set up, and the time to do that sensibly does not seem to be available.

Mr. Forsyth: As I have said, that cannot be done out of the blue, but it will result from the strategic approach of the board. I know that the hon. Gentleman is keen to see that there is no disruption of services as a result of the changes. He should appreciate that all health boards are in the same position and that it is important for them to move towards the policy objectives. I would not agree to any changes because of financial imperatives if they resulted in a reduction in patient care which could be avoided if the matter were to be considered over a longer time.

I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the Borders, any more than any other health board, will be off the hook. These matters are addressed to getting the best value for patients and the best patient care—something which the board has not made a lot of progress towards achieving. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Gentleman to some extent.

Before the hon. Gentleman intervened, I was discussing the establishment of the local trusts. I believe that the proposal will build on the wide range of voluntary and private sector facilities that already exist in the Borders, and have for some time. I hope that it will receive a positive response from the communities concerned.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the timetable to which the board is working. The measures that it is proposing could have been taken some time ago. It is important that the board's income and expenditure are in balance by the end of 1991-92. It would be too early to conclude that it was beyond the capability of Borders health board to achieve that. However, once the consultation process is over, the board may conclude that some of its ideas require further consideration before they can be pursued, and others may take longer to determine than had previously been thought. The board needs to make an assessment of the alternative steps that it might take, at least in the short term, to ensure that it is living within its means.

I should be keen to ensure that my officials keep in close touch with the Borders health board, and continue to do so throughout the financial year. If problems arise, they would be ready to discuss them with the board. I know that the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale are assiduous in looking after the interests of their constituencies. I should be happy to receive representations about any constituency difficulties.

The board's proposals are not a panic response to a crisis, but a step along the road to implementing the board's long-term strategy for its services. There are many positive aspects to the board's proposals. Long-term geriatric care and psycho-geriatric care will be provided locally. It will be possible for geriatric and psycho-geriatric facilities to be located together at the Borders general hospital. That represents a major improvement in services. Furthermore, no closures are proposed.

Sir David Steel: Will the Minister deal with my points about who will be running the trusts, and whether general practitioners are expected to do so?

Mr. Forsyth: It would not be helpful for me to express a view on that, because the board will need to reach its own conclusion—the proposal has come from the board—and is still consulting. Although the board has not yet reached conclusions, I am sure that the general manager or the chairman of the board would be happy to discuss the matter with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister say a word about the use of Department of Social Security money? We are concerned that the use by health boards of income support to provide health care on the cheap for the elderly should not be done without proper consultation and discussion.

Mr. Forsyth: I noted the points made about the topping-up of provision through the DSS. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern and I should be happy to consider the matter in the future. It is important that resources are deployed in a cost-effective way that provides the best standard of care. Our proposals for community care, which will come fully into operation in 1993, will mean that assessment and financing will be in the hands of the local authorities, and the resources will be transferred from the DSS to deal with that. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman were pointing to an apparently anomalous position which is worthy of further consideration. I am happy to give an undertaking to give that consideration.

UN Decade of International Law

2.30 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): I am grateful for this opportunity, principally because it enables me to invite the Minister to assure the House that he and his colleagues have been reflecting carefully on the subject of the debate, and also to tell us what measures they propose to support the United Nations initiative. It is a subject that has received little notice, except in the most reflective and informed sections of the media, yet it could change the course of human history.

Sometimes, events come together to make possible the next great step in human progress. They create what Shakespeare's Cassius called

"a tide in the affairs of men."

We have seen that tide flowing during the past two years. The Gulf war has demonstrated how a small nation is at the mercy of a powerful neighbour, and how people can find themselves projected into a tyranny, unless the international community comes together to prevent it. When it does come together, not only can it prevent one act of tyranny, it can establish a precedent. It can change human thinking and it can lay the foundations for new institutions.

That was possible in Kuwait because two other conditions co-existed—the cold war had ended and Saddam Hussein, by his conduct, had isolated himself from all decent company. However, even then there were problems. No international force was available and no quick response was possible, except from individual nations—in this case, the United Kingdom and the United States. It could be pointed out that the dedication of the United States to international law has been somewhat selective in the past, and it could be suggested that it may have been motivated more by considerations connected with oil wells than with the springs of justice. In the event, international law was vindicated, but we cannot be sure that it will happen next time. Still less can we be sure that a similar tragic war will not be necessary again.

If the world is to be made safe for small and vulnerable nations, if the lives of young people are not to be sacrificed in future wars, and if families are not to have their homes devastated and their safety placed at risk, it is not enough to regret the cost of the Gulf war—we need to seize on the commitment to enforce international law while it still breathes, and to construct the machinery of law and order globally, just as our ancestors constructed it in this country 500 years ago. Governments are not likely to agree to new institutions or to an effective enforcement machinery when they are already embroiled in a crisis, when they have taken up positions and when emotions are running high. The time to work on all that is in the relative tranquillity between crises, when arguments about sanity and justice have a prospect of getting through. That is when we need to reflect on the international rule of law.

We do not need so much to formulate new rules for international law—there is a substantial and comprehensive body of international law, although there are areas that need to be supplemented by new conventions and agreements—the most pressing need is to ensure that it is effective. Already, national sovereignty in the absolute terms envisaged in the 19th century has been reduced to safer proportions. The most recalcitrant and wilful of states is now constrained by the need to maintain a measure of good will among the international community. However, we have just been made aware that it is an uncertain constraint, because it depends on the existence of a consensus among the family of nations.

Yet each time that the law is enforced, each time that it is shown that anarchism does not pay, each time that it is emphasised that those who observe international law are not penalised while their less scrupulous competitors gain an advantage, confidence in international law is reinforced.

A legal system is like currency—its acceptance is almost wholly proportionate to the confidence that people have in it. That requires progress on a number of fronts. First, the United Nations needs to operate in a crisis decisively and quickly, and that will require national Governments to lay on the line a little more of their sovereignty. It may mean considering abolishing the veto in the Security Council.

Secondly, we need a greater sharing of the burden. If the bulk of the cost is borne by the United States, it is hardly surprising that policy should sometimes be decided on the hoof by American officials. It means devising speedier procedures for resolving internationsl disputes. The preparation for international tribunals of long, careful and scholarly memoranda and responses may have to give way just a little to the need for expedition. We may need to make greater use of oral argument.

But above all, we need to work towards a situation where the capacity to make war is removed from nation states and invested in an international authority. Of course, that will need to be a gradual process, proceeding in parallel with the building of confidence. We could begin by providing a modest permanent peace keeping force directly controlled by the United Nations and not dependent on the whim of specific Governments in a particular situation. To have to create a force from scratch whenever there is an emergency is like advertising for firemen when a fire has already broken out.

That is not an idea for which I claim any originality. It has been ventilated by a great cloud of witnesses from St. Augustine, Kant, Tennyson, Attlee and, most recently, one of our former colleagues here, Henry Usborne, who in his 80s has produced his book, "Prescription for Peace". One condition, as he points out, is that national Governments would need to be assured that the international authority would concern itself only with maintaining law and order and would not seek to make policies in other areas of activity and to force them upon unwilling nation states.

That is not to say that we should have no international order except a minimalist one. The maintenance of law and order, vital as it is, is not the only function for which we need an effective international law. Events crowd upon us to illustrate the widening sector of human affairs which needs to be regulated on a global basis. If individuals are to be brought to account for crimes against the fundamentals of civilisation, that cannot be left to the tribunals set up for the purpose each time there is an outrage. That would be seen as victors' justice. We have seen the outcry that arises when it is proposed to try them in the domestic tribunals of a particular state.

This is the moment to establish an international criminal court with a clear jurisdiction. That again is not an idea for which I claim the copyright. It was being debated in the United Nations as long ago as 1947. The debate was frustrated by the cold war. Now is our chance to begin again.

Every day, we see examples of the need for a coherent body of international law to protect the environment. If every problem requires the convening of a new conference with a new round of bargaining, every Government concerned to concede as little as possible, and no one willing to contribute the resources that may be needed, each new problem will meet with a response that is too little and too late.

If time permitted, I could entertain the House with a whole spate of human activities that require a form of global regulation. The liquidation of third-world debt; the harmonisation of tariff barriers; common safety standards; international measures to combat terrorism; the protection of human rights—all presuppose the development of an effective international law.

Despite what I said a few moments ago, we need to look at the substantive context of international law. Classical international law is about ensuring that we keep off one another's backs; that each state can do its own thing without being impeded. It embodies the ideology of individuals. What the 21st century will need is a body of law about positive co-operation; about sharing; about protecting posterity; about a common concern for the planet.

The European Community has shown that nations can embark on a course of positive co-operation. The conference on security and co-operation in Europe has seen the nations of eastern and western Europe, together with the United States and Canada, discussing the ground rules of civilisation for the next generation.

The confederation of European Churches demonstrated in Basel in 1989 that there can be a meeting of cultures and creeds in the pursuit of justice and peace.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has called for a decade of international law to promote the acceptance of, and respect for, the principles of international law, to develop codification, to promote methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes and to encourage the wider study of the subject.

I note that Ireland has responded on behalf of the European Community, but I hope that that document does not exhaust the intellectual, moral and political resources of western Europe. If the world's diplomats have no original ideas, the Association of World Federalists has proposed a number of specific ideas. Surely they merit discussion?

Perhaps the Minister—admittedly after the recess—can have a word with his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who seems hell-bent on making the core history syllabus appear totally irrelevant to the children at the receiving end. Perhaps he can tell him that one of the purposes of the decade is to promote education on the subject.

The vision of an age of universal co-operation, which has been offered to the world by seers and poets through the centuries, could be within reach. Only a fool would pretend that it would be easy, but if we want to pass on that legacy to our children, we shall have to pay the price. If we want to live in a peaceful world, we shall all have to give up the right of being quarrelsome. If we want to live in a just world, we shall all have to give up the right of being selfish.

I believe that future historians will view this issue as the turning point in the saga of human survival, as the vital issue of our generation, and they will judge us by whether we seize the opportunity available or whether we miss the tide.

Britain still has an important role, because our voice is still listened to wherever people gather together to discuss such subjects, and especially legal subjects. The United Kingdom Government could hold up a torch to light the way forward. I invite the Minister to tell the House what we are doing about it.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) for the opportunity to speak on this important subject. He made it clear that it was appropriate that we should be debating this subject in the context of recent events. Undoubtedly, I also agree with his contention that the Security Council's response, being immediate, was a clear recognition that Iraq's actions were not only a challenge to the United Nations but a direct and fundamental attack on the principles of international law. Therefore, it was especially welcome that the Security Council, through a unique and comprehensive series of decisions since last August, should have shown that it was determined to restore the fabric of international legality and, if necessary, to take stern measures to enforce those decisions.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we should consider these matters during the relative tranquillity between crises. Therefore, I congratulate him on bringing the matter before the House today.

I shall be dealing with one or two of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's points at length, but, first, let me give a little of the background. By a resolution in 1989, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared the period from 1990 to 1999 the United Nations Decade of International Law. That same resolution stated that the main purposes of the decade were

> "to promote acceptance of and respect for the principles of international law;
>
> to promote means and methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, including resort to and full respect for the International Court of Justice;
>
> to encourage the progressive development of international law and its codification;
>
> to encourage the teaching, study, dissemination and wider appreciation of international law."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned that. The Government strongly support all those objectives.

In 1990, the General Assembly adopted a programme for the first two years of the decade. The programme, which is rather detailed, envisages full co-operation with other international and regional organisations, and with such eminent private institutions as the International Law Association, the Institute of International Law and national societies.

It is too early to predict what concrete results will emerge, but I can say that work on the decade has started well. It began as an initiative by the non-aligned countries —welcome evidence of the importance that those countries attach to international law. I am happy to say that the days are past when some developing countries regarded international law and its institutions with suspicion, as something imposed on them by the west. There is also a welcome new emphasis in Soviet policy on the primacy of

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

law, and there has been a radical and welcome change in the approach of many eastern European countries as they free themselves from stale communist dogma.

The General Assembly has acted by consensus in declaring the decade and in drawing up the programme of activities. Let me stress the importance that we attach to consensus. If the decade is to contribute to the healthy development of international law, it is essential for that consensus to be maintained in every area. The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the issue of an international criminal court.

We have welcomed the discussion of that issue in the General Assembly, especially in connection with the proposed code of crimes. It would be a major undertaking, and would raise political and practical questions as well as legal and financial ones. Although we are interested in the idea of such a court, we firmly believe that its existence would be justified only if some crimes could not be dealt with effectively by established means.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also mentioned a permanent peacekeeping force. Having said that progress should be made by consensus, let me also say that, although the charter provides for forces to be placed under United Nations authority in advance of any conflict, that provision has not yet proved practicable. For the foreseeable future, such action as was taken in the Gulf—fully authorised and endorsed by the United Nations—is more likely to prove feasible.

Mr. Archer: Surely the argument that such action has not proved practicable—presumably because individual nation states are not prepared to provide the resources—is a bit like saying that the fire brigade has not proved practicable until something actually catches fire.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should prefer to put it this way: what proved practical was what happened during recent tragic events. A response was developed by a coalition of forces in the allied community that was backed and underlined by the clearest possible mandate of United Nations resolutions. The way to proceed is on the basis of what has proved itself rather than on a basis that has not proved to be successful in the past.

The United Kingdom has always played a full role in the discussions on the decade. We co-sponsored the General Assembly resolutions of 1989 and 1990, and we participated actively in the work of the legal committee of the General Assembly and its working group on the subject. We shall continue to do so. That contribution to the decade reflects our contribution to international law more generally. The Government are committed to upholding the rule of law in international affairs and fostering good government and a respect for human rights. I recall the document "Human Rights in Foreign Policy" that the Foreign Office made public a week or so ago. I expect that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has studied it.

The United Kingdom has always made a major contribution to the development of international law, both through its practice—now well recorded each year in the "British Year Book of International Law"—and by its role in the elaboration of treaties and as a depository of many important treaties. It is not only in relation to questions of war and peace that international law is important. In today's world, it plays an increasing part in everyday life. In the past year or so, we have made an important contribution to the elaboration of worldwide conventions on drug trafficking and the marking of explosives and to treaties relating to the environment and disarmament.

If we look back over a longer period, we see that we have played, and that we continue to play, a major role in the Antarctic treaty system and in the law of the sea. Much international law is already of a positive nature—for example, on the environment, drugs and crime prevention. However, I agree that much more could be done. For example, the Government are working very hard on the climate convention.

The United Kingdom is committed to the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Within the conference on security and co-operation in Europe process—a political rather than a legal process—the conciliation proposals that we put forward last autumn formed the core of the mechanism for settling disputes, agreed by officials at the recent meeting in Valletta. On the legal side, we are encouraged by the increasing number of states that accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. In the last couple of years a significant number of additional states have made the necessary declaration. Some of them were developing countries. That is a most welcome trend.

As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know, we are the only permanent member of the Security Council that currently accepts the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. We have always accepted its jurisdiction. Therefore, we are well placed to urge all states that have not yet accepted the court's jurisdiction to consider doing so.

Last year, the Secretary-General of the United Nations established a trust fund to assist developing countries to bring cases before the International Court of Justice by agreement—for example, territorial disputes. The United Kingdom was the first to announce a contribution to the fund. That is a very practical way of encouraging recourse to the court and the rule of law.

The United Kingdom's contribution to international law goes well beyond the Government. The British Institute of International and Comparative Law, the British branch of the International Law Association, and the many universities which teach international law play an important role and have influence well beyond this country. We are particularly pleased that in February the British judge on the International Court of Justice, Sir Robert Jennings, formerly professor of international law at Cambridge university, was elected president of the court for a three-year term. He is, in fact, the third British president of the court since 1946.

Successive British members of the United Nations International Law Commission have been influential. The commission has the potential to make further important contributions to the codification and development of international law. We shall make every effort to ensure that the British candidate for the commission, Professor Bowett, is elected this autumn.

Public awareness of international law has, I believe, never been higher than it is at present. Public awareness is important, for it is ultimately for the people of the various states to ensure, through their elected representatives and through public opinion, that Governments comply with international law. International law will be respected fully only when public opinion in all countries demands that

Governments comply not only with the rule of law at home but with the rule of law in international affairs. Debates like this one, stimulated by the United Nations decade of international law, contribute to that end.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): My hon. Friend's reply to the debate has been an extremely interesting and most reasoned response to the excellent speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), but should not the British Government be taking the lead to remedy the outstanding failure of international law to devise a way to stop dictators such as Saddam Hussein destroying their own people? The United Nations has the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of sovereign nations, which we all understand, but something must be done to enable the United Nations to play some part in stopping such atrocities if we are to have international peace. Are we giving some thought to that, and will we take the lead in that as we have done in recent years in the other excellent activities of the United Nations?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. and learned Friend has raised a big issue at the tail end of the debate, but I can assure him that I am not unmindful of what he has said. Earlier today, we had a debate on the Kurdish people in northern Iraq, when similar sentiments were expressed. Without giving any undertakings, I assure my hon. and learned Friend that these matters are not lost on the United Nations. Clearly, we are likely to expect a resolution from the Security Council, perhaps before Easter, dealing with much wider issues in terms of the ceasefire and in respect of the Iraqi forces. I believe that that resolution will include some matters on which I cannot elaborate on this afternoon touching on some of the issues to which my hon. and learned Friend has drawn our attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Before we adjourn, may I wish all right hon. and hon. Members, officials and staff a very happy Easter recess?

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock till Monday 15 April, pursuant to the Resolution [14 March].

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18 March 1991

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his or her brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am responsible for energy matters in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. My brief is to promote awareness of the Government's energy efficiency campaign and raise the profile of energy efficiency and energy-saving technology in the FCO estate both at home and overseas.

There is a policy of saving 15 per cent. on energy consumption/costs over five years on the home estate. Overseas, the FCO is providing information material to posts to target local industry, commerce and Government decision makers in an attempt to stimulate commercial/technological spin-offs for United Kingdom energy efficiency/saving measures. The FCO is also carrying out other initiatives under the overseas aid programme to help developing countries.

Soviet Union

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of the recognition and diplomatic representation currently accorded to each of the Soviet republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We do not recognise the individual Soviet republics as states. The question of diplomatic relations, therefore, does not arise.

Sudan

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts Her Majesty's Government are supporting to bring the warring parties in Sudan to the negotiating table; and if he will raise during the visit of John Garang, leader of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, in April the case for initiating round-table talks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have urged on both sides in the civil war the need for a ceasefire and the early discussion and settlement of all outstanding problems, but neither the Government of Sudan nor their opponents appear ready to bring this long-running, tragic and wasteful conflict to an end.

War Crimes Tribunal

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet his counterparts in the coalition countries to discuss the establishment of a war crimes tribunal to try the activities of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Various mechanisms already exist under the Geneva conventions for prosecuting grave breaches of the conventions. It is too early to say what machinery might be applied in this case.

PRIME MINISTER

Shops Act

Mr. Duffy: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to provide additional support for local authorities to improve the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Local authorities have a wide range of functions and duties of which enforcement under the 1950 Act is but one. Local authorities receive a substantial contribution towards their total spending of some £40 billion through external grants. The amount provided in external support is being increased by nearly £3 billion this coming year. It is for local authorities to decide how they allocate their resources to provide services and meet their duties.

Pensioners (Heating and Lighting)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Prime Minister what figures the Government have for the average weekly cost to pensioners for heating and lighting in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Peterborough, *(c)* north Wiltshire and *(d)* Richmond and Barnes.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is available only at regional levels. For data on the average weekly expenditure on heating and lighting by pensioners in Northern Ireland I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 13 March at columns *540-41*.

North-west London

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Prime Minister if he intends to make any official visit to constituencies in the north-west London area.

The Prime Minister: I am making a series of visits to all parts of the country and very much hope to include constituencies in London.

Agricultural and Industrial Support

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish in the *Official Report*, an updated version of the table that was given in his answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) on 17 March 1988, *Official Report*, columns *636-37*.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary on 18 February 1991 at column *13*.

East Timor

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his oral answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column 1116, if he is now in a position to make a statement about East Timor.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* Through our embassy in Jakarta, we keep a close watch on developments in East Timor and have made clear to the Indonesians our concern about infringements of human rights, such as those described in the Amnesty report. We will continue to do so.

All countries have a sovereign right under the United Nations charter to secure the means of their own self-defence. Applications to export defence equipment are carefully scrutinised on a case-by-case basis. We do not allow the export of arms and equipment likely to be used against civil populations. In the case of Indonesia this criterion extends to possible use against the civilian population of East Timor.

Soviet Union

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister from which Government Departments United Kingdom contributions to the cost of EC technical assistance to the Soviet Union will be paid; and what proportion from each Department.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The Commission is continuing its exploratory discussions with the Soviet Union and will soon table a proposal on technical assistance to the Soviet Union. The Government will react in due course to that proposal.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Famine

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest assessment of the level of famine in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: The World Food Programme estimates that 29 million people may be at risk of starvation in 25 sub-Saharan African countries. Populations within Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, Angola and Liberia are the most seriously affected with more than 20 million people at risk. I have placed the World Food Programme's most recent table of estimates for Africa in the Library of the House.

36. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's latest estimate of the number of people facing famine in Africa; and what is the Government's total commitment to emergency relief during this financial year.

Mrs. Chalker: The World Food Programme estimates that 29 million people may be at risk of starvation in 25 sub-Saharan African countries. The total provision this financial year for humanitarian assistance is £74 million.

37. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by how much the budget to tackle famine in Africa has been increased for every year since 1987 at 1991 prices.

Mrs. Chalker: There is no separate allocation for famine relief in Africa within the overall humanitarian assistance provison. This provision is enhanced as required during each financial year in order to respond quickly and appropriately to developing countries' needs.

Tropical Forests

38. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the subject of tropical forests; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I receive numerous letters from hon. Members and members of the public who are rightly concerned about tropical deforestation. Many are also interested in the emerging World bank forestry policy paper due for publication in July. My postbag also includes letters from environmental NGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and representatives of the trade.

In addition I have recently received over 25,000 postcards from Friends of the Earth members who are calling for limitations on tropical timber imports and greater attention to environmental and social safeguards in projects carried out by the International Tropical Timber Organisation—ITTO.

The United Kingdom Government believe that import restrictions would be counterproductive and would almost certainly tempt some tropical forest countries to accelerate conversion of forest to agricultural or ranch land. Restrictions or outright bans may also encourage loggers to speed up their rate of timber extraction to recoup investments in machinery and infrastructure. The positive way forward is to encourage Governments to manage and use their forest resources sustainably and to help provide them with the capacity to do this.

The ODA is already at the forefront of initiatives to ensure that ITTO works as an effective organisation. We supported work to produce ITTO guidelines on best management practice of natural tropical forests and will continue to encourage countries to adopt them. We pressed for the establishment of an expert panel to review ITTO project proposals which has now been set up. We are also financing two independent experts to help ITTO review how it handles projects generally including the appraisal of their environmental and social impacts.

Burma

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the level of development aid to Burma in each of the financial years from 1986-87 to the present; and what is the planned level for 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: British aid to Burma since 1986-87 has comprised:

£'000

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Technical Co-operation	889	1,157	1,037	131
Aid and Trade Provision	3,119	3,005	305	17
Disaster Relief	10	—	91	4
Other	51	85	23	46
Total	4,069	4,247	1,456	198

Since the aid programme was suspended in late 1988 due to human rights concerns, expenditure has been limited to residual contract payments under the aid and trade provision—all now complete—completion of training awards for Burmese students already in the United Kingdom, pensions, and humanitarian assistance.

Figures for expenditure in 1990-91 are not yet available. No aid is planned in 1991-92 apart from possible limited humanitarian assistance to refugees.

Sudan

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much food aid has been delivered to Sudan since March 1990; and how much of this food has reached rebel-controlled southern Sudan.

Mrs. Chalker: The precise figures requested are not available from the World Food Programme. However, its statistics show that 282,000 tonnes of food aid was delivered to Sudan from January to December 1990. Of this, 33,300 tonnes was supplied to the south.

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of officers in grades 1 to 7 in the Overseas Development Administration are women.

Mrs. Chalker: The number and percentage of women at G7 and above in the ODA is as follows:

	Per cent.
Grades 1 to 3	none
Grade 5	5—11·40
Grade 6	9—13·40
Grade 7	22—10·95

These figures include eight women who are on secondment to other aid organisations.

Iraq

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources and facilities Her Majesty's Government are prepared to make available by way of medical and technical assistance to Iraq following the report of the United Nations investigative team; if a decision has been made in principle to provide such assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have already provided £2·5 million in humanitarian assistance through the International Committee of the Red Cross. When the UN mission's report on emergency needs is available, we shall respond to any UN appeal for humanitarian assistance.

Cambodia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he is making to the United Nations on the provision of development aid towards *(a)* mine removal and *(b)* provision of clean water supplies in Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: Britain is currently supporting the humanitarian aid programmes of United Nations agencies in Cambodia, including UNICEF, which provides assistance for the improvement of water supplies and sanitation. Provision for mine clearance to be undertaken with the assistance of the UN transitional authority for Cambodia as part of a comprehensive political settlement, was included in the draft document agreed by the permanent five, including Britain, the co-chairman of the Paris conference and the UN permanent representative at their meeting in Paris from 23 to 26 November 1990.

Education Projects

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of overseas aid is being spent on educational projects; in what main areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1989, the latest year for which final figures are available, £180·4 million was spent bilaterally on education projects out of a total bilateral expenditure of £1,113 million. Main areas of expenditure were:

	£ million
Training Support Schemes	110·5
British Council	43·2
English Language Teachers	13·0
Capital projects	6·9
Books, seminars and research	6·8
	180·4

A number of technical co-operation staff working overseas are also in education, but they are not designated by sector.

Much money made available from the aid programme to multilateral organisations such as the World bank, is committed to education. Our bilateral efforts complement this investment.

Future expenditure plans will take into account the priority which overseas Governments give to the call made at the world conference on education for all in Thailand in 1990 for a greater emphasis on basic education and adult literacy.

Non-governmental Organisations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the non-governmental organisations associated with overseas development which received financial support from his Department in 1989-90, the total sum received by each organisation in that year and the breakdown of the total sum received by each organisation to show separately the sums received *(a)* under the joint funding scheme, *(b)* for emergency relief and *(c)* other.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

ODA grants to NGOs 1989-90

Agency	*JFS*	*Emergencies (Disasters, Refugees Food Aid)*	*Others*	*Total*
Acord	450,074	610,000	50,000	1,110,074
Action Aid	499,801	—	735,449	1,235,250
Action on Disability and Development	134,326	—	—	134,326
Action Water	10,000	—	—	10,000

Agency	JFS	Emergencies (Disasters, Refugees Food Aid)	Others	Total
Afghan Aid	—	1,700,000	—	1,700,000
Africa Now	9,960	—	—	9,960
African Medical and Research Foundation	201,179	—	—	201,179
Aga Khan Foundation	312,957	—	1,205,808	1,518,765
AHRTAG	129,133	—	12,730	141,863
Aid Armenia	—	12,261	—	12,261
Aid for India	35,960	—	—	35,960
Alternative for India Development	51,857	—	—	51,857
Anti Slavery Society	34,361	—	—	34,361
Association of Commonwealth Universities	—	—	415,443	415,443
Boys Brigade	13,219	—	—	13,219
British Executive Services Overseas	—	—	360,000	360,000
British Red Cross Society	75,000	196,763	—	271,763
Busoga Trust	33,333	—	—	33,333
Care	797,250	4,859,455	1,489,789	7,146,494
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development	1,000,000	4,391,797	188,905	5,580,702
Catholic Institute for International Relations	92,195	—	1,160,000	1,252,195
Centre for International Briefing	—	—	139,000	139,000
Centre for World Development Education	—	—	129,200	129,200
Child To Child	8,000	—	—	8,000
Christian Aid	1,706,901	3,891,704	594,900	6,193,505
Christian Outreach	—	267,000	—	267,000
Christians Abroad	—	—	18,000	18,000
Commonwealth Human Ecology Council	22,659	—	—	22,659
Commonwealth Trade Union Council	118,612	—	—	118,612
Concern	129,956	801,738	190,673	1,122,367
Conservation Foundation	123,790	—	—	123,790
Cooperation for Development	111,872	—	385,312	497,184
Council for Education in World Citizenship	—	—	4,000	4,000
Cusichaca Project	37,000	—	—	37,000
DPCCN	—	—	400,000	400,000
Duke of Edinburgh Award	77,000	—	—	77,000
Equipment to Charity Hospitals Overseas	24,850	10,234	—	35,084
Farm Africa	—	—	55,000	55,000
Feed the Minds	8,330	—	—	8,330
Goal	—	50,000	—	50,000
Hand In Hand	7,397	—	—	7,397
Harvest Help	40,076	—	—	40,076
Health Unlimited	175,893	—	—	175,893
Help The Aged	75,104	207,591	—	282,695
Homeless International	12,771	—	—	12,771
Impact Foundation	7,096	—	—	7,096
India Development Group	33,325	—	—	33,325
Institute of Development Studies	—	—	2,145,000	2,145,000
Intercare	30,487	—	—	30,487
Intermediate Technology Development Group	184,050	—	93,713	277,763
International Agricultural Training Programme	37,950	—	—	37,950
International Bee Research Association	—	—	32,000	32,000
International Boys Town Trust	33,180	—	—	33,180
International Committee for Red Cross	—	—	100,000	100,000
International Council for Bird Preservation	33,943	—	—	33,943
International Extension College	—	249,796	—	249,796
International Institute for Environment and Development	—	—	63,000	63,000
International Medical Relief	—	80,600	—	80,600
International Rescue	—	23,816	—	23,816
International Trust for Nature Conservation	3,898	—	—	3,898
Jalchatra Project	8,250	—	—	8,250
King Mahendra Trust	14,750	—	—	14,750
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	83,923	—	—	83,923
Living Earth	61,400	—	—	61,400
Lutheran World Federation	—	7,559	—	7,559
Marie Stopes International	484,842	—	35,678	520,520
Medical Aid for Palestinians	—	—	70,975	70,975
Money for Madagascar	3,600	—	—	3,600
National Childrens Home	—	—	15,406	15,406
New Age Access	13,500	—	—	13,500
Ockenden Venture	—	248,536	—	248,536
Opportunities for Women	55,490	—	—	55,490
Order of St. John	—	—	125,000	125,000
Overseas Development Institute	—	—	570,000	570,000
OXFAM	3,100,000	1,763,473	946,881	5,810,354
Passe Partout	10,675	—	—	10,675
Plan	209,608	—	—	209,608
Population Concern	272,392	—	—	272,392
Ranfurly Library Service	—	—	115,000	115,000

Agency	JFS	Emergencies (Disasters, Refugees Food Aid)	Others	Total
Reed Charities	117,969	—	—	117,969
Regional Conference on International Voluntary Service	—	—	5,000	5,000
Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind	36,393	—	—	36,393
Ryder Cheshire Mission	—	30,000	—	30,000
Sandy Galls Afghanistan Appeal	—	134,000	—	134,000
Save the Children Fund	2,400,000	1,464,238	2,337,720	6,201,958
Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund	74,515	—	—	74,515
Scottish Education and Action for Development		—	7,000	7,000
Semi Arid Lands Training Livestock Improvement Centres	25,272	—	—	25,272
Send A Cow	10,120	—	—	10,120
Sheffield Health Authority	53,020	—	—	53,020
Skillshare Africa	68,666	—	980,000	1,048,666
SOS Sahel	76,846	—	100,000	176,846
Special Projects in Christian Missionary Areas		54,094	61,123	115,217
Tear Fund	46,943	11,806	—	58,749
Traidcraft Exchange	22,341	—	—	22,341
Trax	31,943	—	—	31,943
Trust for Education and Development		—	2,000	2,000
Uganda Society for Disabled Children	212,743	—	—	212,743
UK Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific	79,360	—	—	79,360
UNICEF Appeal	—	—	200,000	200,000
UNIPAL	—	12,000	2,322	14,322
United Nations Association International Service	—	—	611,904	611,904
Urban Aid	15,000	—	—	15,000
Vetaid	5,053	—	70,000	75,053
Voluntary Services Overseas	9,000	—	10,375,155	10,384,155
War on Want	—	—	56,179	56,179
Water Aid	628,873	—	230,608	859,481
Womens Corona Society	—	—	4,320	4,320
World University Service	14,861	100,775	420,000	535,636
World Vision	198,399	—	100,000	298,399
World Wide Fund for Nature	1,000,000	—	—	1,000,000
Y Care International	64,729	80,000	—	144,729
You and Me	—	21,000	—	21,000
Young Womens Christian Association	—	7,127	—	7,127
Zimbabwe Trust	31,350	—	—	31,350
TOTAL	16,466,571	21,287,363	27,410,193	65,164,127

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the amount of the office costs allowance per Member for each of the last 10 years; what percentage of the total allowance has been spent in each of the last 10 years; and, of the amount of the allowance which has been spent in each of the last 10 years, what proportions have been spent on *(a)* secretarial salaries, *(b)* research expenses and salaries, *(c)* miscellaneous office expenses and *(d)* other secretarial services.

Mr. MacGregor: The amount of the office costs allowance and the percentage of total estimates provision spent in each of the last 10 years is in the table. Information on the proportions spent on secretarial salaries, research expenses and salaries, miscellaneous expenses and other secretarial services is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Office Costs Allowance

Financial Year	OCA Maximum per Member	Percentage of total Estimates provision spent[1]
	£	
1980-81	7,859	92
1981-82	8,384	96
1982-83	8,752	98
1983-84	11,364	93
1984-85	12,437	100
1985-86	13,211	99
1986-87	20,140	89
1987-88	20,302	97
1988-89	22,588	99
1989-90	24,903	101
1990-91	27,166	

[1] Including Supplementary Estimates where appropriate.

War Crimes Bill

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 6 December to the hon. Member for Northampton, North, (Mr. Marlow) *Official Report*, column 463, what are his reasons for deciding not to bring forward or proceed with any Government amendments to the War Crimes Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: To preserve the possibility of the use of the Parliament Acts in the event of disagreement between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Bill should be returned to the House of Lords in precisely the same form as it went to it last year, apart from purely technical changes necessary to reflect the passage of time. It has been presented to the House of Commons in

that form. The Government have decided not to propose suggested amendments under the procedure provided in the Parliament Acts because the Bill as it stands meets the Government's objectives of implementing the recommendations of the war crimes inquiry, ensuring that any prosecutions are well founded and well prepared and that any defendants have proper and effective safeguards. If the House of Lords wishes to propose amendments in a spirit of seeking to secure the support of both Houses, the Commons will be able to consider these and decide on a free vote.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Government last proposed a motion excluding the Committee stage or amendment of a Bill similar to the motion on the War Crimes Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: A motion to similar effect was last made by the Government on 1 December 1976, relating to the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the differences between men and women in respect of invalidity benefit when they reach normal retirement age.

Mr. Scott: There are no differences in the way invalidity benefit entitlement is determined or paid between men and women when they reach normal retirement age.

Payment of invalidity benefit can continue after normal retirement age 60—women—or 65—men—only if there is entitlement to retirement pension. Invalidity benefit is then payable until retirement pension is claimed or age 65—women—or 70—men—is reached.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Curry: I have given the Minister of State, Baroness Trumpington, special responsibility for energy use within my Department. I attach great importance to the efficient use of energy both within the Department and the industries with which my Department has contact. In line with the Government's objectives, our aim is to save 15 per cent. of departmental energy costs over the next five years. I have asked the Minister of State to encourage the practice of energy efficiency in our policies and pronouncements.

Veterinary Services

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the numbers of veterinarians that have been lost from each location where they are employed since 1979; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *442*, if he will list the veterinary investigation centres; and how many *(a)* veterinarian, *(b)* scientific, *(c)* administrative and *(d)* laboratory posts will be lost as a result of his decision to close these centres.

Mr. Gummer: It is not possible or meaningful to list the number of veterinary posts that have been lost from each individual location where they are employed since 1979 because where individual locations have been closed, amalgamated or relocated, additional veterinary posts have been allocated to other locations to cope with the additional work load.

The number of veterinary posts located at veterinary investigation centres was 87 in 1979, is 84 in 1991 and it is expected that there will be 72 such veterinary posts in 1995. The numbers of veterinary posts in those central laboratories which comprise the central veterinary laboratories was 97 in 1979, is 73 in 1991 and it is expected that there will be 73 veterinary posts in 1995.

For the same reasons it is not possible or meaningful to list the *(a)* veterinarian, *(b)* scientific, *(c)* administrative and *(d)* laboratory posts that will be lost in relation to specific individual veterinary investigation centres. I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *442*, which gives this information in relation to these posts when the reorganisation of the VI service is completed in three or four years' time. One of the 13 veterinary post losses referred to in that reply is accounted for by a post in the national management team located at the state veterinary service headquarters at Tolworth.

As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Member of 14 March 1991, at column *680*, the changes in the structure of the veterinary investigation service are designed to produce significant improvements in the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the service and I consider it important that we have an efficient VI service which is well equipped to meet our national needs over the years ahead.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the results of the test for the presence of BSE undertaken by Dr. Harash Narang, at the public health laboratory, Newcastle, on the bovine brains supplied by his Department.

Mr. Gummer: Publication of the results of the research being undertaken by Dr. Narang is a matter for him. All the material and data requested by him as a part of this study have been supplied by my Department.

Food Safety

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has issued guidelines to local authority environmental health departments on recommended levels of staffing for implementation of the Food Safety Act and the registration of food premises in particular.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Staffing levels are a matter for local authorities to determine locally.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Agency

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the accounts for the Training Agency for 1989-90 and 1990-91 will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Jackson: It had been planned to lay the White Paper accounts for the Training Agency for 1989-90 before Parliament in December 1990, but their preparation has been delayed and they will now be published in May 1991. The Training Agency has now ceased to exist as a separate operation entirely and no further White Paper accounts will be prepared.

Racehorse Breeding

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are estimated to work in the racehorse breeding industry.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is included in the estimates for agriculture and horticulture, which do not separately identify the racehorse breeding industry. In September 1990, the latest date for which information is available, there were 307,000 employees in employment in agriculture and horticulture in the United Kingdom.

Rathbone Society

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the Rathbone Society about the precautionary notices of redundancy it has issued to its staff in England and Wales and the imminent closure of the training and employment service it provides for people with learning difficulties; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The chief executive of the Rathbone Society wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 1 March and the chairman wrote on 10 March. I shall be replying shortly.

On 26 February my right hon. and learned Friend announced we were making available an additional £120 million for employment training in 1991-92 bringing our total expenditure on the programme to £877 million.

Training and enterprise councils will be able to use this additional money to provide training in line with the priorities set out in their plans including training for those with learning difficulties and other special needs. It is for individual TECs to decide, in the light of local circumstances, with whom they will contract to provide the necessary training.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the unemployment figures for Hendon, North have been during each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will state what factors have affected any changes in them.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. The figures available are on the unadjusted basis and are therefore affected by seasonal influences.

TECs (Advertising)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total budget for television, newspaper and other advertising for the launch of training and enterprise councils; what is the total budget for advertising for each TEC so far established; what is the cost of such advertising nationally and locally, expressed in terms of each person now undertaking training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The total budget for television, newspaper and other advertising for the launch of training and enterprise councils is £10 million.

The overall budget for local publicity and marketing by TECs in 1990-91 is £4 million. The amount allocated to individual TECs is adjusted during each financial year according to changing requirements.

The figures on the cost of TECs advertising nationally and locally, expressed in terms of training can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Ashworth Hospital

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the complaints procedure at Ashworth hospital is one that the patients can have complete confidence in.

Mr. Dorrell: One of the Special Hospitals Service Authority's tasks in its current action plan, agreed in last year's ministerial review of the authority's performance, is to design and implement a revised complaints procedure. The authority has informed me that a formal policy and statement of principles have now been agreed and that the detailed procedures are being finalised. It intends to implement the new procedures from 1 June 1991. Apart from these internal arrangements, the Mental Health Act Commission has statutory responsibilities under section 120 (1) of the Mental Health Act 1983 for investigating complaints made by, or in respect of, patients detained under the Act. Commissioners make regular visits, as the Act requires, to Ashworth and other hospitals where patients are detained.

Patient Statistics

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will give the number of in-patients, out-patients and day-patients treated in the northern region in 1980, 1985 and 1990, together with the percentage change.

Mr. Dorrell: The information available is given in the table. It is not possible to make a direct comparison of in-patient treatments between 1989-90 and earlier years. Following implementation of the Korner reports on health service information, the basis of counting in-patient treatments was changed in 1988-89 to reflect the number of individual episodes of care under a consultant. The old and new methods of counting in-patients were both used during 1988-89 in order to provide continuity in time series comparisons.

Northern Regional Health Authority

Year	*In-patients*	*Out-patients*	*Day cases*
1980	393,788	2,338,383	54,023
1985	433,131	2,543,549	75,473
1989-90	504,745	2,522,192	96,243

Notes:

The 1980 and 1985 in-patient figures are discharges and deaths.

The 1989-90 figures are finished consultant episodes.

For 1988-89 the information on in-patients was collected under both headings: there were

461,033 discharges and deaths and

496,617 finished consultant episodes.

Source:

SH3 for 1980 and 1985.

KP70 for in-patients and day cases 1989-90.

KHO9 for out-patients 1989-90.

Percentage change

	In-patients	*Out-patients*	*Day cases*
1980-85	10	9	40
1985-1989-90	8	−1	28
1980-1989-90	19	8	78

Note:

The in-patient changes have been calculated to take account of the definitional change from discharges and deaths to finished consultant episodes.

Insulin

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding insulin supplies to national health service patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Representations have been received on the safety of human insulin. While at present there is no evidence of a problem associated specifically with human insulins, the Committee on the Safety of Medicines will continue to liaise with the British Diabetic Association in closely monitoring the situation. Representation has also been received on the supply of free needles for insulin manufacturers proprietary syringes. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) on 11 March at column *353*.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his or her brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Dorrell: I have this responsibility. My brief is to contribute to the target saving in energy of 15 per cent. over the next five years for all Government Departments. In addition, we are aiming to achieve the same target saving for the national health service. This is against a background of savings in the order of 30 per cent. made since 1977-78.

Cancer Screening

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has made any arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the national screening programme for breast and cervical cancer, measured both in health terms and cost-effectiveness; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 21 February at columns *241-42*. We are collecting information which will monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the computerised call and recall for breast and cervical screening programmes. As these are new programmes it will be a number of years before their effect in health terms or cost-effectiveness can be fully assessed.

Doncaster Royal Infirmary

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide the hon. Member for Don Valley with a full copy of the financial data submitted by Doncaster royal infirmary during consultations on self-governing trust status.

Mr. Dorrell: No. The supporting financial statements through applications for national health service trust status are confidential documents submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Community Care

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the method by which his Department will calculate the amount to be transferred from his Department to local authorities when community care is implemented.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper "Caring for People"—Cm. 849—set out the factors which will be taken into account in calculating the sums to be transferred from the social security system to local authorities. The amount to be transferred will be determined in the 1992 public expenditure survey following discussions with the local authority associations.

Intensive Therapy Units

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people die in intensive therapy units annually; whether he can break the number down according to age groups; and what percentage are likely to be considered as organ donors.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information provided by the national audit of potential donors, initiated by the Government in 1989, just over 1,000 patients per month died in intensive therapy units in England during 1989 and their average age was 57 years. Some 8·4 per cent. were considered to be potential cadaveric organ donors on the basis that they were confirmed brain stem dead and there were no general medical contraindications to organ donation.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding is given to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service; what licences or other Government approvals are required for the activities of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service; and what official contacts he has had with the British Pregnancy Advisory Service in the past year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British Pregnancy Advisory Service—BPAS—does not receive central funding though some of its income will come from its contracts with health authorities. BPAS nursing homes, like all hospitals, homes and clinics within part II of the

Registered Homes Act 1984 must be registered by the relevant health authority and inspected at least twice a year by that authority. In addition, BPAS and other private sector clinics providing abortion treatment must be approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under the Abortion Act 1967. BPAS also operates a number of pregnancy advice bureaux which are registered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. All approved places and pregnancy advice bureaux are subject to periodic unannounced inspections by the Department's staff. BPAS premises have therefore received a number of official visits by departmental and NHS staff over the past year.

From 1 August BPAS will be obliged to comply with licence conditions contained in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, and any extra conditions which are imposed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority—HFEA—if it wishes to continue to provide assisted conception services which are subject to regulation by that Act. If it is licensed it will also be expected to follow the guidelines in the code of practice that the HFEA will produce.

Virgin Births

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the use of artificial fertility techniques by women who are virgins; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of treatment to single women was debated in both Houses of Parliament during the passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill last year. The results of these debates are reflected in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The Act makes no reference to a woman's marital or other status as a condition for receiving treatment.

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Act, a woman shall not be given treatment services unless account has been taken of the welfare of any child who may be born as a result of the treatment, including the need of that child for a father. Treatment services involving donated gametes or the creation of embryos in vitro may not be provided to a woman unless a suitable opportunity has been given to receive proper counselling about the implications of the proposed steps.

As required by the Act, a code of practice will be produced by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority which will include guidance to treatment centres on counselling and the welfare of the child. Such centres will need to comply with the provisions of the Act and will be expected to follow the code of practice guidelines. The final draft of the code of practice must be approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and laid before Parliament.

These and other provisions of the Act are expected to come into force on 1 August 1991.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Security

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of appeals heard and decided by tribunals concerning *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit, *(c)* social fund funeral benefit and *(d)* non-income-related benefits during the year 1989-90.

Mr. Hanley: The number of appeals heard and decided during the 1989-90 year is as follows:

	Appeal Successful	*Appeal Unsuccessful*	*Total*
Income Support	123	368	491

	Allowed	*Disallowed*	*Adjourned*	*Total*
Family Credit	43	93	56	192
Social Fund (Funeral Benefit)	2	4	—	6
Unemployment Benefit	51	140	55	246
Sickness Benefit	55	50	58	163
Invalidity Benefit	677	378	645	1,700
Severe Disablement Allowance	22	14	20	56
Maternity Benefit	—	1	—	1
Statutory Sick Pay	4	10	9	23
Guardian's Allowance	—	1	—	1
Child Benefit	23	72	46	141
Mobility Allowance	1	36	10	47
Injury and Disablement Benefit	31	26	56	113
Reduced Earnings Allowance	54	32	80	166
Pensions	6	31	20	57
Attendance Allowance	6	6	7	19
Invalid Care Allowance	10	17	31	58

Voluntary Organisations

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the main funding headings which are used in providing grants to voluntary organisations and the changes that have taken place over the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: On 4 April last year my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the publication of the report of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector. Annex D of that report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, contains a list of grant schemes through which voluntary organisations were funded in 1987-88 and 1988-89. Details of changes which have taken place over the last five years are not available centrally.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in a table under the

relevant headings all funding given to voluntary organisations in the most recent year for which figures are available and for the previous four years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of the total grants made to voluntary organisations by Government Departments are announced each year by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Details for 1988-89 were announced on 11 May last year, at columns *254-55*. Similar announcements covering total grants made in 1987-88, 1986-87 and 1985-86 were made respectively on 16 May 1989, *Official Report*, columns *120-21*, 14 April 1988, *Official Report* columns *217-19*, and 2 March 1987, *Official Report* columns *464-65*. A further announcement in respect of total grants made in 1989-90 is expected to be made shortly.

A list of all voluntary organisations funded by Government Departments was placed in the Library of the House when details of grants made in 1988-89 were announced last May.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Financial Services

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to make companies providing financial services liable for losses resulting from poor or misleading advice given by independent intermediaries who market the products of a small range of companies.

Mr. Redwood: Independent advisers are responsible for the advice they give, and their conduct of business is subject to rules made under the Financial Services Act.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions he has had with the regulatory bodies about the classing of the sale of home income schemes to elderly people as best practice under the terms of the Financial Services Act;

(2) if he will issue advice directly to elderly persons to draw their attention to the risks associated with entering into home income schemes;

(3) what consideration he has given to introducing controls on the sale of home income schemes to elderly people.

Mr. Redwood: These are matters for the regulatory bodies. I understand that the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Assocation and the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation have issued guidance to their members.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to ensure that sufficient information is available to the public to clearly explain the distinction between tied and independent agents.

Mr. Redwood: The Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulating organisations, such as LAUTRO and FIMBRA, are responsible for making and enforcing rules on these matters under the Financial Services Act. The distinction between tied agents and independent financial advisers is important and I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on 7 December 1990, at columns *223-24*.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to require tied agents to disclose commission on products in the same way as independent agents.

Mr. Redwood: The Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulating organisations, such as LAUTRO and FIMBRA, are responsible for making and enforcing rules on such matters under the Financial Services Act. On the general issue of disclosure, I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley on 7 December 1990, at columns *223-24*.

Shipbuilding

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what expenditure is expected in 1990-91 on the residual obligations of British Shipbuilders.

Mr. Leigh: Arising out of settlement of an outstanding claim by Trafalgar House, British Shipbuilders now has a liability of £17 million not covered by the provision in the 1990-91 supply estimates. Parliamentary approval for the necessary payment to BS will be sought through a supplementary supply estimate on class IV vote 2 in 1991-92. Pending that approval, this expenditure, which is urgent, will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

Fireworks

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the figures of injuries caused by fireworks in 1990.

Mr. Leigh: According to reports from hospitals in England, Wales and Scotland, 805 people required treatment for injuries caused by fireworks during the three weeks leading up to 5 November 1990 and the few days after, an increase of less than 1 per cent. However, serious injuries fell by 7 per cent. There was an increase in injuries to young adults, but a fall of 12 per cent. in injuries to 13 to 15-year-olds, the group most at risk. There was an increase of 16 per cent. in injuries from bangers and of 10 per cent. for rockets, and sadly, of 12 per cent. from sparklers. Injuries from other fireworks went down. Injuries from incidents in the street were up 7 per cent., but injuries from family firework parties were down 4 per cent. and from small public displays down 17 per cent. There were 110 million fireworks let off in 1989 and we estimate that there were 12 to 15 per cent. more let off in 1990. The detailed breakdown for 1990 and the preceding four years is as follows:

Firework injuries in Great Britain
(4-week period in October-November)

Year	*1990*	*1989*	*1988*	*1987*	*1986*
TOTAL	805	800	877	960	846
Place of accident					
1. Family or private party	269	280	300	260	286
2. Semi-public display (e.g. scouts, cricket club)	59	71	69	88	72
3. Large public display	135	135	123	155	119
4. Casual incident in street, etc.	264	247	298	364	299
5. Other place	64	46	65	73	52
6. Indoors	14	21	22	20	18
Type of firework					
1. Banger	158	136	162	163	161
2. Rocket	144	131	164	174	159
3. Roman candle, coloured fire, etc.	66	89	83	96	88
4. Home-made or extracted powder	7	18	17	24	14
5. Other proprietary fireworks	73	125	86	109	118
6. Sparklers	93	83	102	95	80
7. Unspecified type	264	218	263	299	226
Severity of injury					
1. Fatal injury	—	—	—	—	—
2. Detained more than one night	38	46	69	60	48
3. Sufficient to cause absence from work or equivalent	138	142	167	158	160
4. Minor injury	590	551	587	661	582
5. Unspecified injury	39	61	54	81	56
Eye injuries (included in 2–5)	269	275	269	312	291
Age group of injured persons					
1. Over 20	269	251	280	252	235
2. 16–20	142	135	151	168	145
3. 13–15	134	152	166	220	207
4. Under 13	260	262	280	320	259

Climate Change

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has made any contribution to the second preparatory meeting for the 1992 United Nations conference on environment and development.

Mr. Lilley: I have today published a report entitled "Global Climate Change: The Role for Technology Transfer". The report was prepared for UNCED by Touche Ross and financed jointly by my Department and the Overseas Development Administration.

The report has been distributed widely to those delegates attending the preparatory meeting for UNCED starting today in Geneva. I hope the report will offer a constructive contribution to their further discussions on technology transfer in the context of climate change and help future work move forward in a positive way. It establishes a working background on technology transfer which should assist both developing and developed countries to identify the scope for mutual partnership and assistance which will contribute to the international response to climate change.

I have arranged for copies of the report to be made available to the Libraries in each House.

Northern Region

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the amounts spent by his Department in support of new technologies, technology transfer and innovative research and development in the northern region since 1983.

Mr. Leigh: The Department does not have reliable regional innovation spend figures because its innovation budget is not allocated on a regional basis. The amount spent in specific areas is dependent on the number of companies that come forward with good projects. Any figures would thus be a reflection of industry activity rather than Government policy. However, for the special reason that we are looking to attract European structural funds, there has been an allocation made for SPUR, which supports product development. The northern region (the north west, north east, and Yorkshire and Humberside) has so far been allocated nearly one third of the SPUR budget.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the major investment projects attracted from overseas to the northern region since 1983, together with the capital cost of each project and the amount of grant offered.

Mr. Leigh: The table lists details of major inward investments known to have located in the northern region since 1 January 1983. These are projects where known capital costs were over £5 million, and the table details the amount of regional selective assistance offered to each company.

Major inward investments in the Northern region since 1983

Company	*Project costs £ million*	*RSA grant £'000*
Kodak Ltd.	6·4	2,000
British Alcan Aluminium plc	7·0	2,000
Transfer-All Purpose Foils Ltd.	5·3	819
Forbo-Mayfair Ltd.	6·5	700
Black and Decker	9·9	2,000
THC Fabricators (UK) Ltd.	6·2	575
Philips Components Ltd.	9·9	900
Black and Decker	22·0	2,450
Komatsu Ltd.	16·4	1,200

Company	Project costs £ million	RSA grant £'000
NSK Bearings Europe Ltd.	32·0	1,600
TC Industries of Europe Ltd.	6·0	1,295
Tolaram Polymers Ltd.	14·4	350
Nissan UK Ltd.	349·9	35,000
NSK Bearings Europe Ltd.	15·1	450
Black and Decker	9·8	1,000
Sterling-Winthrop Group Ltd.	15·1	3,382
Key-Tech (Europe) Ltd.	11·3	1,200
Uponor ltd.	16·0	330
Swaddlers Ltd.	8·8	950
Newcastle Chronicle and Journal Ltd.	5·4	700
Fujitsu Microelectronics Ltd.	400·0	30,000
Goldstar Electric Ltd.	8·0	Nil
BASF Chemicals	6·0	Nil
Swilynn (UK) Ltd.	14·1	2,950
Nissan UK Manufacturing Ltd.	216·0	14,400
Cookson Fukuda Ltd.	24·3	650
Hashimoto Forming Industry Co. Ltd.	9·9	1,500
3M UK Ltd.	11·9	1,700

Notes:

1. Major inward investment projects have been defined as those first time investments, or expansions of existing investments, by foreign owned companies which involve project costs of over £5 million.
2. Details of grant are for offers of regional selective assistance (RSA) accepted by foreign-owned companies since 1 January 1983. Comparable information on other forms of assistance is not readily available. (Not all inward investments receive RSA).
3. The Northern region is the North East region plus Cumbria.

Aircraft Manufacturing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to secure the future of the commercial aircraft manufacturing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: It is for industry to safeguard its future by remaining competitive while Government create a climate in which enterprise can flourish. In the particular case of the commercial aircraft industry, Government have provided substantial launch aid and support pre-competitive research through the CARAD programme.

Equipment Maintenance Contracts

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received alleging unfair terms in maintenance contracts for office and industrial equipment.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 12 March 1991]:* I have received a number of complaints about photocopier leasing agreements where the lessee felt that he had been misled as to the length of the agreement, the overall cost of the agreement, or in some cases, as to the nature of the agreement itself.

The code of practice of the Equipment Leasing Association requires members to "behave with integrity" and not to

"misinterpret facts to a lessee concerning any aspect of a leasing transaction".

This is the standard the Government would expect of the industry and is the only way for the industry to retain the confidence of its customers.

However, potential lessees also have responsibilities. Anyone in business who signs a leasing agreement should make sure that he has fully understood the terms and the overall cost. An agreement for instance, which looks like a bargain for the first 18 months may be substantially more expensive when looked at over the full term.

Companies should also make sure that such agreements can be signed only by someone of sufficient authority to ensure that the terms have been fully considered. This should be standard practice even where a document appears to be only an amendment to an earlier agreement.

If misrepresentation has occurred then there are remedies in law. In certain circumstances fraudulent misrepresentation may amount to a criminal offence. Whether any particular company has been guilty of misrepresentation would be a matter for the courts.

A licence under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 is required by any person or company wishing to carry on a consumer hire business. A company may have its licence suspended or revoked by the Director General of Fair Trading if he believes that the company is not fit to engage in the activities covered by the licence.

Anyone with information relevant to a person's suitability to hold such a licence should send it to the DGFT.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will ask the Director General of Fair Trading to prepare a report on the terms and conditions to be found in maintenance contracts for office and industrial equipment;

(2) if he will ask the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate the pricing and supply of parts and labour for the maintenance and repair of office and industrial machinery.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 12 March 1991]:* I am aware of no justification for doing so.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Child Care

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost to the Exchequer in a full tax year of introducing a child care tax allowance on the first *(a)* £1,000, *(b)* £2,000 and *(c)* £5,000 of taxable income for (i) working single parents and (ii) couples where both spouses are working.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are given in the table. They are based on projections from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys and are therefore provisional.

Cost (£ billion)

	Allowance per year of (a) £1,000	(b) £2,000	(c) £5,000
(i) Lone parents	0·1	0·1	0·3
(ii) Married couples	0·5	1·0	2·0

Friendly Societies

Mr. Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the outcome of consultation on the Green Paper, "Friendly Societies: A New Framework"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) on 19 December 1990 at column *177*.

Customs Service, Lowestoft

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the Customs service at Lowestoft with effect from 1 January 1992.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Customs office at Lowestoft is a sub-office of Great Yarmouth Customs office. It is staffed by three officers whose main duties involve anti-smuggling controls.

Following a departmental strategic review by Customs on its approach to anti-smuggling work the emphasis is now on deploying resources in a more versatile way with the creation of flexible anti-smuggling teams. It is the intention, therefore, to close the Lowestoft office at about the end of 1992 and cover the work from Great Yarmouth which is 10 miles away.

Before the transfer of the small amount of work which is not anti-smuggling takes place, Customs will consult the Lowestoft port users to discuss alternative arrangements required after the office closes.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to modify the present arrangements for customs clearance at Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth after 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to my replies to his questions on the future of the Customs service at Lowestoft and studies by Customs with particular reference to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on studies his Department has carried out on the Customs service between Grimsby and Felixstowe, with particular reference to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No studies have been carried out which are solely concerned with the Customs service between Grimsby and Felixstowe.

A nationwide study, which includes East Anglia, is being undertaken as part of a current review of the Customs control of non-EC freight traffic after 1993. This study is not yet concluded.

I also refer my hon. Friend to my reply to his question on the proposed closure of the Lowestoft Customs office following a strategic review by Customs of its approach to anti-smuggling work.

Bloodstock

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the rates for value added tax on bloodstock in, respectively, Ireland, France and the United Kingdom; and if he has any plans for harmonisation.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The VAT rates for bloodstock in Ireland, France and the United Kingdom are respectively 2·3 per cent., 5·5 per cent. and 15 per cent. The Government do not consider that centrally determined tax rate harmonisation is either necessary or appropriate for the completion of the single market.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what capital allowance subsidies the London Docklands development corporation will have received as a result of enjoying enterprise zone status.

Mr. Maude: Because of the rules of confidentiality, I am unable to give information about the tax affairs of any particular business or corporation.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Atkins: I am the Minister responsible for energy efficiency policy in the Department. The Department has a strategy to achieve energy savings totalling 15 per cent. in its offices which form part of the public estate, over a five-year period up to 1995. Savings will be achieved through various initiatives such as the installation of automatic sensors to reduce the amount of energy used, more effective monitoring of consumption, regular maintenance of plant, good housekeeping techniques, and poster, sticker and publicity campaigns. A building management system is being installed at the Department's new premises in Westminster.

Active encouragement has also been provided to conserve energy in educational buildings. Savings have been achieved by supporting development projects, dissemination of guidance on good practice, and commissioned research. LEAs are currently spending £43 million a year less in real terms on energy than they did in 1978-79.

Current initiatives include support for work being undertaken by the building research energy conservation support unit in connection with its four-year £1 million programme to save energy in schools. DES publications offering advice on how to make energy savings are also currently being prepared.

Nursery Schools, Kent

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funds have been allocated by Kent county council for the provision of nursery school places in Kent for the last 10 years that figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The readily available information on school-based recurrent spending on nursery schools by Kent county council, taken from the authority's spending returns to Government, is as follows:

Year	*Net institutional expenditure £000*
1978-79	11
1979-80	11
1980-81	20
1981-82	41
1982-83	38

Year	Net institutional expenditure £000
1983-84	46
1984-85	59
1985-86	60
1986-87	63

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what grant has been made available to Kent education authority for the provision of nursery school places in Kent for the last 10 years that figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: Support for nursery provision is given primarily through unhypothecated block grant by central Government in support of all local authority services. Until 31 March 1990, the distribution of block grant was dependent on the grant-related expenditure assessment (GREA) which had a nursery component. From 1 April 1990 the distribution of block grant has been made by reference to the standard spending assessment (SSA) which has a component for pupils under the age of five.

From 1981-82 to 1989-90 the figures for the nursery component of Kent's GREA were as follows:

	£ million
1981-82	4·16
1982-83	3·42
1983-84	3·82
1984-85	4·28
1985-86	4·16
1986-87	4·30
1987-88	4·76
1988-89	5·88
1989-90	6·97

For 1990-91, the under-five block of the education element of Kent's SSA, which allows for the education of its pupils under the age of five (including nursery pupils), was £16·83 million.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many nursery school places have been made available in Kent by Kent education authority for the last 10 years that figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: Information on the number of nursery school places is not available centrally.

The numbers of pupils in maintained nursery schools in Kent for the last 10 years are as follows:

January each year	Pupils on roll
1981	82
1982	85
1983	88
1984	79
1985	90
1986	84
1987	78
1988	81
1989	82
1990	80

Primary Schools (Library Service)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate on the state of school libraries and school library services in primary schools.

Mr. Fallon: The HMI report on 42 primary school libraries in 20 LEAs is not yet completed. When it is, the senior chief inspector will send it to the Secretary of State and it will be published in the usual way.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate on the state of school libraries in primary schools and school library services for primary schools has been completed.

Mr. Fallon: HMI is conducting an inspection of 42 primary school libraries in 20 LEAs. HMI has no remit to inspect school library services. The report on school libraries is not yet completed and has not therefore been sent to the Secretary of State by the senior chief inspector.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total cost, in staff and resources, of the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate on school libraries in primary schools.

Mr. Fallon: As the HMI exercise inspecting 42 primary school libraries in 20 LEAs is not yet completed, it is not possible to provide the information asked for. Such information can be provided when the exercise and the resulting report are completed.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his plans for the operation of the assisted places scheme operating for parents of pupils in independent schools in the next academic year.

Mr. Fallon: The assisted places scheme, which has operated every year since 1981, will operate again in the academic year 1991-92 when a total of 33,450 places will be available. A statement about the annual adjustment of the parental contribution scales for the scheme will be made shortly.

Special Needs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidelines he has issued to local education authorities in England with regard to the provision of speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The Department issued circular 22/89 on "Assessments and Statements of Special Educational Needs: Procedures within the Education, Health and Social Services" in September 1989. This contains guidance on the need for authorities to work closely with district health authorities and social services departments on the provision of non-educational services.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will ensure that all statements of educational needs undertaken in England under the

provisions of the Education Act 1981 specify the need for therapies such as speech therapy, where such provision is relevant to the educational needs of the child.

Mr. Fallon: The form of statements of special educational needs is set out in the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1983, as amended. These provide that statements shall specify the special educational provision which the education authority considers appropriate to meet a child's special educational needs. The preparation and maintenance of such statements is the responsibility of local education authorities.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority to publish its second annual report.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority published its second annual report on 15 March. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on direct access from Manchester to the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: There will be road access via the M6, M1 or M40, M25 and M20. British Rail plans to operate direct daytime rail passenger services from 1994 and is looking into the possibility of running some services from north of London to connect with the inter-capital trains at Waterloo from the opening of the tunnel. It hopes to announce the location of the international freight terminal in the Manchester area later this year.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the statutory limit laid down on the amount British Rail may borrow under the terms of the Transport (Finance) Act 1982; by how much this has increased since then; what the original limit is, uprated for inflation; and if he will now bring forward proposals to amend the Act both in line with inflation and the special circumstances of the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's borrowing limit remains as set out in the Transport (Finance) Act 1982, at £1,100 million, extendable by order to £1,300 million. These figures have not been increased to take account of inflation. At 31 March 1990 BR's capital liabilities to the Secretary of State were £202·8 million. The need for increased borrowing limits for BR is kept under regular review.

Ferries

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the International Maritime Organisation to consider the recommendation of its specialist sub-committee that a higher standard of residual stability should be applied to all existing roll-on roll-off passenger ships.

Mr. McLoughlin: During the fortnight commencing 12 May 1991.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Isle of Man

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what help has been requested of the United Kingdom Government by the Isle of Man legislature or judiciary within the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government regularly receive, and respond to, a wide range of requests from the Isle of Man legislature and judiciary for information, advice and services, in some instances under reciprocal arrangements between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man. A central, chronological record of the number and exact nature of such requests is not kept.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the machinery for reviewing alleged miscarriages of justice.

Mr. John Patten: This will be among the matters to be considered by the Royal Commission on criminal justice, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 14 March.

Escaped Prisoners

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer on 25 February, *Official Report*, column *398*, on recaptures of escaped prisoners, what sentence the escapers had been given; and how much had been served in each case.

Mrs Rumbold: Iketa Margarita Jackson was serving a sentence of four years' imprisonment and had served one year three months and 15 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Salamat Oluwag-Bemigun was serving a sentence of four years six months' imprisonment and had served two years three months and three days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Florence Amawuage Asore was serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment and had served two years and five months and one day, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Molly Donalds was serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment and had served one year and two days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Karen Rhoden was serving a sentence of eight years' imprisonment and had served one year and 13 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Patricia Weir was serving a sentence of six years' imprisonment and had served one year two months and 22 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *158*, on recaptures of escaped prisoners, what sentence the escapers had been given; and how much had been served in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: Mavis Mary Sasu was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and had served nine months and 14 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Mojisola-Ishodi Soetan was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and had served one year six months and 19 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Regina Morays Aina was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and had served two years and 15 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Aderinsola Abosede Agbabiaka was sentenced to four years' imprisonment and had served 10 months and 25 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Bernadette Ambrose was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and had served one year eight months and 27 days, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Kudi Balogun was sentenced to two years and six months' imprisonment and had served one year and eight months, including time spent on remand, when she absconded.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the differences in the methods before November 1990 and thereafter of recording recaptured or surrendered prisoners who absconded from open prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The essential difference is that information is now collected centrally direct from prisons and stored on a computer. Previously it was collected and processed manually by each of the now defunct regional offices.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his or her brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) represents the Department on the ministerial group on energy efficiency, and is responsible for encouraging energy efficiency in the Department.

WALES

Local Government Reorganisation

13. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about local government reorganisation in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about this, and we are considering them as part of the review of local government structure, functions and finance.

Secondary Schools

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1978-79, at constant prices.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In 1988-89 current expenditure per pupil in secondary schools in Wales was £1,656. The equivalent constant price figure for 1978-79 was £1,168.

Community Charge

16. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the distribution of transitional community charge rebates.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To date, my right hon. Friend has received 81 letters about the community charge reduction scheme for 1991-92.

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of Welsh district councils to discuss local government finance.

Mr. David Hunt: On 7 January.

23. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average level of poll tax set, to date, by councils in *(a)* Mid Glamorgan and *(b)* Wales in respect of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Local authorities are required to submit details of their proposed budgets and community charge for the year to my Department but only some of this information has been received to date. Authorities have until close of play today to submit details of their budgets. They are required to submit details of their community charge by 31 March. I am aware of estimates suggesting that the average community charge for 1991-92 will be around £263. Such an outcome would be a disappointing response by local authorities in Wales to the excellent revenue support grant settlement for 1991-92 that I announced to the House on 17 January. If local authorities had budgeted to spend in line with my plans the average community charge level in Wales should not exceed £228; around £190 for counties and around £38 for districts.

Charge payers will know that the responsibility for decisions leading to an average community charge of more than £228 falls squarely on those authorities that have failed to spend in line with the realistic and achievable plans I have announced for the coming financial year.

Labour Statistics

19. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unemployment figures *(a)* in numbers and *(b)* in percentage terms, for men and women in Wales; and what were the figures in February 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: The seasonally adjusted numbers of male and female unemployed claimants in Wales are 78,200 and 21,900. The rates are 10·3 per cent. and 4·1 per cent. respectively. Comparable figures in February 1990 for men were 63,000 and 8·3 per cent. and for women 21,000 and 3·9 per cent.

Housing

20. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the rural housing situation in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: On 20 February my right hon. Friend announced that £3 million would be available in

1991-92 to assist in meeting the special needs of rural housing authorities. Additionally, Housing for Wales expects to spend almost £32 million providing 900 new units in rural areas. All this is in addition to the substantial amounts available for repair and maintenance of stock in the public and private sectors.

22. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy initiatives he proposes to alleviate the Welsh housing crisis.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Housing in Wales will continue to benefit from the vigorous measures that we have applied consistently and successfully to increase home ownership in the Principality; to improve stock condition; to enhance partnership between the public and private sectors; to upgrade local authority management in the interests of tenants; and to increase the provision of social housing by housing associations. With these initiatives in place I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Universities Funding Council

24. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chair of the Universities Funding Council to discuss the allocation of funds to institutions in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The statutory responsibility for deciding allocations to the constituent colleges of the university of Wales rests with the Universities Funding Council, taking into account advice from its Welsh committee. It would not therefore be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to seek to interfere in the Universities Funding Council's deliberations on this matter.

Inward Investment

25. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps have been taken to encourage inward investment into Wales over the last 12 months.

Mr. David Hunt: Welsh Development International has continued to strengthen its activities. This has been reflected in record results for last year when 142 projects were secured promising some 16,000 jobs and capital investment of almost £640 million. I led an inward investment mission to Japan in November during which three new projects were announced.

Health Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for how long and for what reason the operating theatre of Machynlleth hospital has been closed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for Powys health authority which advises that the theatre has been closed since September 1988. Theatre sessions were cancelled to meet the request of medical staff of neighbouring East Dyfed health authority, who had been undertaking the operations at Machynlleth for a number of years, for theatre equipment to be upgraded. This work has been carried out and following the appointment of a consultant anaesthetist the two authorities are in discussion about recommencing theatre sessions.

Under the waiting times initiative, Powys health authority was allocated funds in 1990-91 to enable patients who would otherwise have been seen at Machynlleth to receive treatment at Bronglais hospital, Aberystwyth.

Loft Insulation

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of how many homes in Wales have loft insulation of 150 mm thickness.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will introduce for Wales a scheme similar to the greenhouse scheme in England to provide specific funds for local authorities for energy conservation.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 25 January.

Secretary of State (Flat)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the expenditure on the Secretary of State's flat at the Crown buildings, Cathays park, in the current financial year and, on the same accounting basis, for each of the previous four financial years.

Mr. David Hunt: Annual recurring costs of rent, rates, utilities, cleaning and laundry, are subsumed in the Department's overall accommodation charges for the Cathays park building. The only separately identifiable expenditure since 1985-86 occurred in the current financial year and amounts to £1,531·16.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the principal items of consumer durables and kitchen equipment acquired for the Secretary of State's flat at Crown buildings, Cathays park, in the present financial year.

Mr. David Hunt: Bed linen, a microwave oven, a television receiver and a video recorder.

Video Recordings

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the titles of the video recordings purchased out of the Welsh Office hospitality fund in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Hospitality Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the main categories of expenditure covered by the Welsh Office's hospitality fund; and how much has been spent under each heading *(a)* in 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990-91 so far.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office's hospitality fund is not divided into separate categories of expenditure. The total amounts spent have been:

(a) £38,397·87 in 1989-90; and
(b) £40,998·96 in 1990-91 (to 11 March 1991).

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the total amounts paid by central Government as rate rebates, community charge

rebates and transitional relief for every year since 1975, including an estimate for 1990-91, in cash and real terms and as a proportion of total local government spending.

Mr. Key: The information available is as follows:

Domestic rate rebates paid by central government

	Cash (£ million)	In 1989-90 prices (£ million)	Per cent. of local authority gross revenue expenditure
England and Wales			
1975-76	106	355	1
1976-77	114	336	1
1977-78	125	324	1
1978-79	134	314	1
1979-80	158	317	1
1980-81	219	371	1
England			
1981-82	304	470	2
1982-83	433	625	2
1983-84	1,009	1,392	4
1984-85	1,126	1,478	5
1985-86	1,219	1,517	5
1986-87	1,349	1,624	5
1987-88	1,391	1,588	5
1988-89	1,129	1,201	4
1989-90	1,210	1,210	4

Initial claims from local authorities for community charge rebate subsidy and transitional relief grant in 1990-91 total £1,828 million and £260 million (£1,693 million and £241 million in 1989-90 prices) respectively. These figures represent 4 per cent. and 1 per cent. of the estimated local authority gross revenue expenditure in the year though due to changes in the system of local government finance these percentages are not comparable to the earlier years.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in cash per head of population for each local authority, the amounts allocated by central Government in *(a)* grants, *(b)* community charge rebates and *(c)* transitional relief for 1990-91, with an estimate for 1991-92, ranked in order of the community charge levied by each authority.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for the available information for 1990-91 to be placed in the Library of the House. Information on community charge rebates and transitional relief grant for local authorities in 1991-92 is not available while authorities are now in the process of informing the Department of their average community charge.

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take against councils that fail to pursue individuals who have not paid the community charge.

Mr. Key: Charging authorities are required by regulations made under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to bill all chargeable persons in their area. They have extensive powers to enforce payment. If an authority decides not to enforce an outstanding charge and writes off the amount it will have to justify its decision to the auditor. Any amount properly deemed uncollectable must be taken into account when setting charges for future years. Failure to take effective enforcement action will only add to the amount that charge payers are required to pay in subsequent years.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grant per poll tax payer is received by St. Helens metropolitan borough council.

Mr. Key: Government grants, consisting of revenue support grant, special grants, specific grants in aggregate external finance, community charge benefit grant and transitional relief grant, per head of relevant population in 1990-91 are £448 in St. Helens metropolitan borough council.

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, for 1990-91 and 1991-92, he will list for each local authority in Cornwall and Devon the estimated capital domestic rates for properties with a property value of £50,000, £80,000 and £120,000 and rates of local income tax required, together with the resultant tax bill for a person with a taxable income of £8,000 and £12,800 implied by levels of local authority income requirements.

Mr. Key: The level of bills in a particular local authority area with a capital value-based property tax, or a local income tax, would depend on the precise way in which such a system was introduced.

Illustrative figures showing possible bills in 1990-91 were placed in the Library on 4 April 1990. The table provides the information requested based on these figures. Comparable information for 1991-92 is not available.

Illustrative impact of capital value based domestic rates and local income tax

	Capital value based domestic rates bill per property valued			Local income tax		
	£50,000 £	£80,000 £	£120,000 £	Rate in the pound Pence	Bill with taxable income of £8,000 £	£12,800 £
Cornwall						
Caradon	483	773	1,160	6·7	536	858
Carrick	500	800	1,200	6·9	552	883
Kerrier	488	781	1,172	6·7	536	858
North Cornwall	474	758	1,137	6·5	520	832
Penwith	454	727	1,090	6·2	496	794
Restormel	469	750	1,125	6·4	512	819
Devon						
East Devon	485	776	1,164	6·7	536	858
Exeter	497	795	1,193	6·9	552	883
Mid Devon	512	820	1,230	7·1	568	909
North Devon	493	789	1,184	6·8	544	870
Plymouth	481	769	1,154	6·6	528	845
South Hams	481	769	1,153	6·6	528	845

	Capital value based domestic rates bill per property valued			Local income tax		
	£50,000	£80,000	£120,000	Rate in the pound	Bill with taxable income of	
	£	£	£	Pence	£8,000	£12,800
					£	£
Teignbridge	527	843	1,265	7·4	592	947
Torbay	594	950	1,425	8·5	680	1,088
Torridge	497	796	1,194	6·9	552	883
West Devon	484	774	1,161	6·7	536	858

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities for costs incurred in connection with the community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Portillo: The community charge reduction scheme which replaces transitional relief will reduce personal community charges for about 18 million people in 1991-92. Local authorities will be reimbursed in full for the income forgone as a result of the scheme. In addition they will receive grant in respect of all reasonable preparation and administration costs.

The proposals which I am announcing today are based on the framework of the current grant arrangements for the transitional relief scheme. This approach has been discussed and agreed with the local authority associations.

Preparation costs will be reimbursed in full on the basis of the actual expenditure incurred, as confirmed by the authority's auditor. This will largely cover the modification of existing transitional relief computer software and related expenditure.

General administrative costs, in particular dealing with inquiries, will be reimbursed at a flat rate of 15p per charge payer, with an allowance for higher costs in London.

In addition to the flat rate per charge payer, local authorities will be reimbursed for the costs of administering the reduction scheme for residents of sheltered accommodation on the basis of a flat rate of 50p per resident of sheltered accommodation, with an allowance for higher costs in London.

Applications for extra reductions will be reimbursed at the same rate as under the transitional relief scheme of £3 per charge payer, plus an allowance for London, for each application made, including the cost of dealing with unsuccessful applications.

Where authorities send out bills without taking reductions into account and second bills have to be issued, the cost of printing and postage will be reimbursed at the rate of 50p each. This will not apply where the second bill relates to a substitute charge.

Initial claims from local authorities indicate that preparation and administration costs for the transitional relief scheme will be close to provision of £21 million. On the basis of the proposals which I have announced today, the additional preparation and administrative costs grant for the implementation of the new reductions scheme would be about £10 million in total.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for *(a)* rate support grant per head, *(b)* business rate income per head, *(c)* total aggregate external finance and *(d)* spending per head for each county council in England.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 March 1991]:* Community charges, revenue support grant and receipts from the non-domestic rate pool are not paid directly to individual authorities but rather into a collection fund operated by, but separate from, the charging authority in each area. Shire counties precept upon this collection fund for their income. It is not possible to determine how much of their income is from each particular source.

Budgeted expenditure in 1990-91 per head of relevant population for each of the shire counties

	£
Avon	787
Bedfordshire	851
Berkshire	797
Buckinghamshire	812
Cambridgeshire	768
Cheshire	802
Cleveland	987
Cornwall	778
Cumbria	802
Derbyshire	812
Devon	748
Dorset	673
Durham	783
East Sussex	686
Essex	742
Gloucestershire	756
Hampshire	713
Hereford and Worcester	697
Hertfordshire	748
Humberside	867
Isle of Wight	754
Kent	725
Lancashire	853
Leicestershire	830
Lincolnshire	730
Norfolk	704
Northamptonshire	814
Northumberland	743
North Yorkshire	725
Nottinghamshire	841
Oxfordshire	784
Shropshire	789
Somerset	780
Staffordshire	730
Suffolk	740
Surrey	668
Warwickshire	763
West Sussex	642
Wiltshire	744

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the percentage of community charge payers who have so far paid their bills for each district in Kent.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* The available information, returned by the local authorities is as follows:

Percentage of personal community charge payers making a payment by 31 December 1990

	Per cent.
Ashford	95·8
Canterbury	97·0
Dartford	95·2
Gillingham	95·0

	Per cent.
Gravesham	95·1
Maidstone	95·0
Rochester upon Medway	86·6
Sevenoaks	89·9
Swale	88·2
Thanet	83·2
Tonbridge and Malling	93·8
Tunbridge Wells	90·2

In Dover and Shepway 87 per cent. and 85 per cent. of personal community charge payers had made a payment by 30 September 1990, respectively.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken of the receipt of unemployability supplement in the calculation of entitlement to transitional relief and community charge benefit.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* Broadly, the calculation of transitional relief is based on the difference between the domestic rates in 1989-90 and the community charge, although disabled people who are not former ratepayers and whose partner is not a former ratepayer may be entitled to extra transitional relief if on 1 April 1990 they met one or more of the conditions conferring the right to a community charge benefit disability premium. These conditions do not include unemployability supplement but a person in receipt of the supplement may meet the conditions, for example through receipt of attendance allowance. Community charge benefit takes into account unemployability supplement in the calculation of a claimant's net earnings.

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the community charge figures declared by each district in England for the forthcoming year in ascending values.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* I am arranging for the information for those local authorities that have, to date, made returns to the Department to be placed in the Library of the House. Until results are reported by all authorities it is inappropriate to place them in rank order.

Chemical Incinerators

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he gives local authorities about when it would be appropriate for planning committees to grant planning permission to build chemical incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Planning applications to build chemical incinerators will, like all development proposals, need to be considered on their individual planning merits taking account of relevant material considerations. The Government have not issued planning guidance relating specifically to chemical incinerators. However, work is in hand on the preparation of a planning policy guidance note on pollution and waste management which we plan to issue in draft for public consultation later this year. One of the issues on which we shall be consulting is the need for planning guidance on the location and siting of incinerators.

St. Edmundsbury Council

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the figures available to his Manpower Watch Office for the staff of all grades employed by the St. Edmundsbury council in each year since 1985.

Mr. Portillo: The information is as follows:

Staff employed by St. Edmundsbury district council (at June of each year)

Year	Full-time	Part-time	Total staff
1985	558	157	715
1986	567	173	740
1987	580	188	768
1988	616	185	801
1989	656	196	852
1990	678	200	878

Leybucht Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the European Court of Justice judgment on the Leybucht bay case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 12 March. I am unable to give the judgment formal consideration until I have received the official English translation.

Bloodstock Breeding

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of land are used in the business of bloodstock breeding.

Mr. Yeo: No official statistics are available, but the industry itself has estimated that approximately 151,000 acres are in use for this purpose.

World Wide Fund for Nature

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the 30th anniversary of the World Wide Fund for Nature to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 15 April to 19 April.

Planning Circulars

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list, by date and title, all planning circulars published by his Department since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The Department of the Environment/Welsh Office index of current planning guidance (May 1990) includes a chronological list of planning circulars extant at 30 April 1990. The following Department of the Environment planning circulars have since been issued:

9/90 (W.O. 28/90), Crime Prevention: The Success of the Partnership Approach;

14/90 (W.O. 20/90), Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines;
15/90 (W.O. 36/90), Consolidation of the Town and Country Planning Legislation;
22/90 (W.O. 55/90), Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1990.

DEFENCE

Nuclear-powered Submarines

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether HMS Resolution, HMS Revenge and HMS Repulse have undergone full detailed inspection of their nuclear reactors and primary cooling circuits.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In common with all Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines, the nuclear propulsion systems of the Polaris submarine fleet are subject to continuous monitoring procedures and rigorous safety checks, and are inspected regularly in the course of the fleet's routine maintenance programme.

Cadet Forces, Scotland

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what organisational or financial links his Department has with cadet forces in private schools in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The MOD administers the combined cadet force (CCF) as a voluntary part-time force organised in schools and colleges and part of the national youth movement in the United Kingdom.

Control of the CCF is exercised by the Defence Council through the three service departments which are responsible for the organisation, training and administration of the Royal Navy, Army and RAF sections of the CCF respectively. The MOD consults with representatives from the headmasters' associations and the CCF via the Defence Schools and Universities Policy Committee, the Inter-Services Cadet Committee and the Combined Cadet Force Association.

The MOD provides grants to CCF contingents to cover general administration, training and travel costs.

There are 14 CCF contingents in independent schools in Scotland, with a total strength of 2,600 cadets.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces has responsibility for energy efficiency within the Ministry of Defence.

He chairs the steering group for defence energy efficiency, which determines overall energy efficiency policies and sets and monitors energy savings targets. He represents the Department on the ministerial group on energy efficiency, which oversees the Government-wide 15 per cent. saving campaign. The Ministry of Defence has a long-standing record of energy saving achievement and we are determined that this should continue.

Community Charge

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to allocate a rateable value to Ministry of Defence houses in order to provide a base level upon which community charge reduction scheme rebates can be calculated.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Eligibility for the community charge reduction scheme depends on the entry in the property valuation list for 1989-90.

Tanks

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now proposes to announce the placing of an order to replace the Chieftain tank.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 7 March at columns *290-91*.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his evaluation of the Challenger 2 tank is complete.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 4 December 1990 at column 158.

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation making it unlawful for a person who buys a council house to subsequently sell that house, retain the profit, then take a new tenancy of a local authority house.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We do not believe that the type of case referred to arises on a significant scale and we have no plans to amend the legislation governing either the right to buy or the allocation of council houses.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households were registered on the local authority housing waiting lists in *(a)* Inverclyde district council, *(b)* Renfrew district council, *(c)* Strathclyde and *(d)* Scotland as a whole at the latest date for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Reliable information is not held centrally.

Foxes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the procedure for registration of a fox destruction society with his Department; and through which agency moneys allocated to such societies are disbursed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: To qualify for registration a fox destruction society must satisfy the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department that there is a need for systematic control of foxes within a clearly defined area and that the society will undertake this control in a responsible manner. Payment of 50 per cent. of the approved expenditure of the society is made by the Department following scrutiny of audited accounts.

Government Assistance

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all central Government assistance to Govan Initiative Ltd. since its inception, showing where possible specific allocations to specific purposes.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Central Government support for the Govan initiative is set out in the tables:

Scottish Development Agency support	*Core funding* £
1 October 1987 to 31 March 1988	16,250
1988-89	80,000
1989-90	80,000
1990-91	95,000

Urban programme support for projects:	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Govan initiative training shop	148,834	143,627	143,627
Central Govan safe neighbourhood Project	99,484	182,109	209,989
Business and the arts Govan	32,149	36,710	97,363
Enterprise theatre—Govan	—	67,900	785
Training outreach bus for the unemployed	—	23,000	—
New technology training for the unemployed	—	19,850	—
Industrial development—Helen street	—	234,000	—
Business support unit	—	—	45,894
Security assistance for small businesses	—	—	165,467
Total	280,467	707,196	663,125

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions his Department has reached following evaluation of reports submitted by Govan Age Concern; and what his policy is towards continuing support to this and similar organisations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In 1986 the urban renewal unit considered a report by Strathclyde regional council on the work of Govan Age Concern as part of the regional council's application for extension of urban programme funding for the project. The report was sufficiently favourable to warrant approval of the extension application. The maximum period of urban programme support for Govan Age Concern ended in 1989. Since then the question of continued public sector support for the project has been primarily a matter for Strathclyde regional council. The question of public support for similar organisations is in the first instance a matter for social work authorities.

EC Assistance

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what economic assistance Dumbarton constituency has received from the European Economic Community since 1985.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available in the form requested.

Education Standards

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responsibilities Government have to ensure that schools in the private sector meet standards of education at least equivalent to those in state schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Independent schools are required by law to register with my right hon. Friend who must be satisfied that efficient and suitable instruction is being provided. For this purpose, independent schools are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools before receiving final registration. Thereafter, they are subject to inspection on a continuing basis in the same way as schools managed by an education authority.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds in hospitals there were in the Argyll and Clyde health board in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The average number of available staffed beds in Argyll and Clyde for the years ending 31 March is set out in the table:

	Number
1979	4,623
1986	4,386
1990	4,103

ScotRail Land

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what land he has purchased from ScotRail within the past three years in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information as to the sellers of land purchased by the Secretary of State for Scotland is not always included in records maintained of land purchase transactions. Accordingly, to discover which land purchased by the Secretary of State within the past three years was so purchased from ScotRail, it would be necessary to examine individual case transaction files. As there are many hundreds of transactions involving the Secretary of State as purchaser, the relevant information in answer to the question could be obtained and provided only at disproportionate cost.

Land Regeneration

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what programmes have been prepared by his Department to assist local authorities that have schemes to regenerate decaying areas of land and properties in their areas commencing in the year 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Local authorities in Scotland receive support for their land and property renewal activities through Scottish Office general services allocations.

In addition, there is a wide range of other bodies able to undertake or assist environmental renewal projects.

The Government's main instrument for land and property renewal in Scotland is the Scottish Development Agency, which is able to allocate its own priorities and resources to undertake or assist environmental improvement and land reclamation projects. The work of the agency in this area will be continued, from 1 April this year, under Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, mainly through the local enterprise companies.

The Countryside Commission for Scotland also undertakes projects for environmental renewal of decaying

areas of land, most notably through its countryside around towns programme, which is undertaken in conjunction with local authorities, the SDA, local voluntary bodies and UK 2000 Scotland. Detailed plans for the implementation of the central Scotland woodlands initiative, which aims to bring about substantial improvements to degraded landscapes in central Scotland, are currently under consideration by the Government.

Historic Buildings and Monuments assists with work to repair buildings in outstanding conservation areas, both directly and with local authorities through its town scheme programme. Assistance for environmental improvement works is also available in certain circumstances from Scottish Homes, the urban programme and the European regional development fund to assist land and property renewal projects.

There therefore exists a comprehensive package of support for environmental renewal in Scotland.

Dentists

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists have left the national health service since the introduction of the new contract.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Between 1 October 1990, when the new contract was introduced in Scotland, and 28 February 1991, 75 general dental practitioners have resigned from the NHS; 13 have retired and 106 have been admitted to health board dental lists. The net effect is an increase of 18 general dental practitioners providing NHS general dental services in Scotland.

Tree Planting

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will be publishing the Firn, Crichton, Roberts report on the woodland grant scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The report is now available and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Water Grants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what applications have been received from local water authorities in Scotland for water grants to enable them to meet EC water and sewerage requirements.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* Central Government grants are not specifically directed at EC water and sewerage requirements. From 1 April 1990, however, 90 applications have been received from Scottish water authorities for grant under the Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Acts 1944-70 which can include items for meeting EC standards. In addition, an application for sewerage improvement grant under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 has been received from each regional and islands council in respect of its 1991-92 capital expenditure programme for sewerage, including EC-related works.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the staff complement that is considered necessary to discharge the duties of the Scottish pollution inspectorate; and how many vacancies currently exist;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the grades and salary scales of officers in the Scottish pollution inspectorate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* There are currently 13 professional and eight administrative staff in post in Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate in Scotland. There is one vacancy at unified grade 7 (industrial pollution inspector) level which we would anticipate filling shortly. The table shows grades and salary scales.

Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate

Grade	*Scale minimum* £	*Scale maximum* £	*Salary maximum including performance pay* £
Unified grade 5 (Chief IPI)	32,551	36,997	43,307
Unified grade 6 (Senior IPI)	24,997	32,551	38,610
Unified grade 7 (IPI)	21,905	26,121	31,150
Higher executive officer	12,367	15,786	17,835
Executive officer	7,286	12,621	14,259
Administrative officer	4,561	9,278	9,928
Administrative assistant	4,121	7,574	8,104
Personal secretary	7,834	9,598	10,270

Part of the remit of a current staffing review of the inspectorate is to establish whether or not staff numbers are adequate to carry out its necessary work including that associated with new legislation. The salary scales of the inspectorate professional officers are also under review.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 March 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Business Rate Arrears

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many companies are currently in arrears in payment of the business rate in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: This information is not available. However by 31 December 1990, charging authorities in England had collected 76 per cent. of their estimated non-domestic rate income for 1990-91. My Department, which is responsible for collecting non-domestic rates in respect of hereditaments entered on the central rating list, has now collected the whole of the amount payable for 1990-91.

Loan Charges

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the loan charge proportion of each pound of rent charged by each local authority in the last available financial year; and what are the regional and national averages.

Mr. Yeo: I cannot strictly say what proportion of rent is attributable to loan charges because local housing authorities also have other sources of income, particularly that of housing revenue account subsidy. Nevertheless, I have today placed in the Library a copy of a table showing, for each local authority, the proportion of rental income and subsidy spent on loan charges.

Wakefield

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Wakefield metropolitan district council with regard to the difficulties facing the authority in attempting to collect standard community charge payments from individuals who do not have the financial resources to make such payments.

Mr. Key: I am not aware of any representations having been made by the council, although officials in my Department meet on a regular basis officers from Wakefield metropolitan district council in the group with which matters of this kind are discussed with the local authority associations.

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when a rents-to-mortgages scheme for the new town tenants at Milton Keynes will come into operation.

Mr. Yeo: Milton Keynes development corporation is today writing to its tenants inviting them to consider buying their homes under rents to mortgages. Sales will be completed before the transfer of the corporation's housing stock to new landlords.

I warmly welcome this further opportunity for new town tenants at Milton Keynes to own their homes.

Community Charge

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average poll tax for 1990-91 in England and Wales; how many people are registered for the poll tax; and how much extra central Government finance would be necessary for the average poll tax to be reduced by *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 25 per cent., *(c)* 50 per cent., *(d)* 75 per cent. and *(e)* 100 per cent.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* In 1990-91 there are 36 million charge payers in England and the average community charge is £357. Authorities have budgeted to raise £10·2 billion from the charge net of community charge benefits and transitional relief grant. This can be reduced without any extra central Government finance if authorities control their expenditure and improve their efficiency.

Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all documents, advertisements, promotion or events undertaken by his Department to publicise elements of his Department's work, showing the cost in each case for each year since 1987, including the budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on 12 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *442*. The outturn for 1990-91 is not yet available and the budget for 1991-92 has not yet been finalised. A list of each item which has contributed to the publicity programmes could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish a timetable for implementation of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to the reply, 28 November 1990, c. 404]:* My right hon. Friend has today laid before the House the Litter Etc (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1991.

These provide that, where an authority has assigned its street cleaning work to its own work force or DSO under part I of the Local Government Act 1988, and it needs to undertake additional work to comply with the duties imposed on it by the Environmental Protection Act, the authority will be able to assign that additional work to the DSO, provided that it is accounted for separately from the work originally assigned to the DSO. If the cost of the additional work carried out between 1 April and 30 September 1991 is more than 20 per cent. of the cost of the work originally assigned to the DSO over that period, the

authority will be required to expose its street cleaning services to further competition in accordance with the following timetable:

Date by which work first had to be exposed to competition	*Date by which work has to be retendered*
1 August 1989	1 October 1992
1 January 1990	1 January 1992
1 August 1990	1 August 1993

Where an authority has assigned street cleaning services to an independent contractor it will be taken as complying with the duties imposed by the Environmental Protection Act if it can demonstrate that it has used its best endeavours to negotiate any necessary variations in the contract with the contractor concerned, but he is either not prepared to agree such variations or is prepared to do so only on unreasonable terms.

The regulations also contain provisions relating to the transfer of highway cleaning responsibilities from county to district councils under the Environmental Protection Act. They allow district councils to assign such work to their DSO, provided that they account for it separately and that they first use their best endeavours to enter into an agreement with any contractor who previously carried out this work under contract with the county council. They also facilitate the making of works contracts between district councils to which this responsibility has been transferred and the authorities who were carrying it out before 1 April 1991.

The regulations apply also to Scotland and Wales except that regulations 5 and 6 dealing with the transfer of highway cleaning responsibilities from county to district councils are not applicable in Scotland.

Community Charge

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the community charge figures declared by each district in England for the forthcoming year in ascending values.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to the reply, 18 March 1991, Official Report, column 40]:* As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the House today in his Budget speech, the Government are providing £4.3 billion of extra grant to local authorities in Great Britain in 1991-92 to permit a major reduction in community charges.

Accordingly, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I shall shortly be introducing a Bill which, on enactment, will mean that the community charges which authorities have set for 1991-92 will be replaced by new lower charges. Each new charge will be £140 lower than the one it replaced, or zero in those cases where the original charge was less than £140. The Bill will suspend the liability of charge payers to pay any 1991-92 charges until a charge bill has been received reflecting the reduced charges.

The community charge reduction scheme will continue to help those who would still face large increases over their previous rate bills. Although the total help that will need to be given through this scheme will be much reduced by the lower charges announced today, I expect that, together with the effect of community charge and other benefits, it will mean that the average charge actually paid in England will be less than £170.

The Bill will also require grants to be paid to charging authorities in England and Wales, and to local authorities in Scotland. It is our intention that the grants paid under these provisions should provide full compensation for the community charge income forgone and should also fully reimburse authorities for their reasonable additional administrative costs as a result of the reduction in charges. I also intend in England to advance the distribution of the non-domestic rates pool to offset the inevitable cash flow losses which authorities will incur as a result of this measure. Broadly similar funding arrangements are intended for Scotland and for Wales.

All this means that where authorities have already issued their charge bills for 1991-92—which many have already done—they will need after the Bill's enactment to issue fresh bills reflecting the new lower charges. Until fresh bills are issued authorities may think it best not to enforce payment from their charge payers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I propose to amend the regulations on the community charge demand notice slightly to provide the basis for the new bills, but we believe not in ways that would result in significant changes to authorities' computing arrangements. Where authorities have not yet issued their bills, they may think it right to suspend action until bills complying with the new arrangements can be issued.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be advising Scottish authorities about the details for billing and collecting charges.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mortgage Repossessions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General how many court actions relating to mortgage repossessions there were in Cardiff county court in each year since 1979.

The Attorney-General: The number of mortgage actions for possession entered and orders made for possession in Cardiff county court in each year since 1986, the first year for which figures are available, are shown in the table.

	Number of mortgage possession actions entered	*Number of mortgage possession orders made*
1986	518	358
1987	750	327
1988	685	262
1989	622	295
1990	973	630

ENERGY

Independent Generation

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, stating size, fuel and ownership, all the independent generating projects of which his Department is aware.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department is aware of 20 proposed major independent electricity generating projects which have been made public. The following is the information requested by the hon. Member:

Promoter/Consortium	Location	Estimated output (MW)	Fuel
Barking Power Ltd.	Barking, London	1,000	Gas
East Midlands Electricity plc/ British Coal Corporation	Bilsthorpe	150	Coal
Berisford Bristar plc	Brigg, South Humberside	240	Gas
British Nuclear Fuels plc	Calder Hall, Sellafield	160	Gas
Corby Power Ltd.	Corby, South Humberside	350	Gas
Coryton Cogen Ltd.	Coryton, Essex	460	Gas
Deeside Power Development Co. Ltd.	Deeside, Clywd	450	Gas
MetroPower Ltd.	Greenwich, London	370	Gas
Energy Resources Ltd.	Keadby, Humberside	720	Gas
MetroPower Ltd.	Lots Road, Chelsea, London	370	Gas
Forth Energy Ltd.	Newcastle	150	Gas
Texaco Ltd./Mission Energy	Pembroke, Dyfed, (Angle Bay)	1,100-1,280	Gas
Peterborough Power Ltd.	Peterborough	355	Gas
Lakeland Power	Roosecote, Cumbria	235	Gas
Rugby Power Co. Ltd.	Rugby, Warwickshire	380	Gas
Kelt (UK) Ltd.	Ryedale (Claypit Plantation)	50-60	Gas
Sheffield Heat & Power	Sheffield	160	Gas
Shell UK Exploration Ltd.	Shellhaven, Essex	524	Gas
Neptune Consortium	Teesside	1,050	Gas
Teeside Power Ltd.	Wilton, Cleveland	1,725	Gas

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Wakeham: I chair the ministerial group on energy efficiency which is composed of a Minister from each major Government Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) represents the Department of Energy.

Each Minister on the group is expected to take forward the energy efficiency campaign on the Government estate and secure 15 per cent. annual savings in their Department's energy bill by 1995-96. In addition, all Ministers on the group have agreed to consider how energy efficiency can be incorporated into their Department's policy and publicity initiatives. The group intends to promote and raise awareness of energy efficiency in all sectors of the economy.

My hon. Friend and I also have specific responsibility for the work of the Energy Efficiency Office within the Department of Energy, which has the following main objectives:

(i) to encourage consumers and buildings professionals to take action which will lead to improved energy efficiency, by stimulating their interest and providing them with specific and authoritative guidance on what can be achieved;
(ii) to stimulate the development and application of energy management skills and techniques;
(iii) to tackle market barriers such as the obstacles to public sector use of private sector expertise, and the inability of some low-income householders to raise funds and manage projects;
(iv) to help develop technical standards.
(v) to help the energy efficiency industry develop, and encourage it and the energy suppliers to develop and market goods and services which help consumers improve their energy efficiency;
(vi) to promote combined heat and power where it is cost effective.

Electricity Privatisation

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates were made, in preparing for privatisation of the electricity generating companies, of the average costs per tonne or equivalent *(a)* of transporting coal (i) by road and (ii) by rail from ports to power stations, *(b)* by tranche of coal supplied by British Coal to power stations, *(c)* of heavy fuel oil supplied to power stations, *(d)* of orimulsion supplied to power stations and *(e)* of imported coal by country of origin.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Fuel procurement is a commercial matter for the companies concerned. All material information relating to the companies is included in the prospectus, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Electricity Transit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (i) what discussions he has had with organisations representing electricity consumers in the United Kingdom concerning the principle of third-party access prior to his negotiations with his EC counterparts on the EC's proposed regulation on electricity cross-border transit;

(2) when he next expects to meet his EC counterparts regarding third-party access to electricity grids; and what considerations underlie his policy in these negotiations;

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the regional electricity distribution companies, generating companies and Gridco, regarding the principle of third-party access in negotiations with the European Commission.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The directive on electricity transit was adopted by the Energy Council on 29 October 1990 and is to be implemented by 1 July 1991. Third-party access would go much further in contributing to an open and competitive market in electricity. The Commission has established two consultative committees to advise on third-party access: a member states committee and a parallel professional committee which includes the chairman of NGC and representatives from the generators and large consumers. My right hon. Friend will consider with his colleagues in the Energy Council any proposals which the Commission may bring forward.

TRANSPORT

Buttermere Valley (Parking)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the decision of Cumbria county council to restrict parking in the Buttermere valley; and what response he intends to make.

Mr. Chope: Including those that the hon. Member has sent me, the Department has received 16 separate representations about this matter. I understand that my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for the Environment has received a similar number.

As I indicated in my previous reply on 11 March, this is essentially a local highways issue well within the management responsibilities of the county council as the locally elected highway authority.

I shall arrange for all representations received to be passed to the county council for its information and action as it considers necessary.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am the Minister within the Department of Transport responsible for promoting energy efficiency and I represent the Department on the ministerial group on energy efficiency.

My brief is to see that the Department meets the Government's target of a 3 per cent. annual saving in energy costs on its estate through to 1995-96, and to ensure that the Department promotes greater energy efficiency in its policy and publicity initiatives.

International Leisure Group

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) at what point his Department was in a position to warn passengers of the problems they faced in relation to the financial difficulties confronting the International Leisure Group; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when his Department became aware of the financial difficulties facing Air Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority to monitor the financial fitness of air carriers and air travel organisers. The Department of Transport was kept informed of the position as it developed and of the attempts to maintain trading. To have made public statements about the companies' financial affairs while there was still a serious prospect of rescue would simply have precipitated the crisis.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss Air Europe.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Civil Aviation Authority has kept my right hon. and learned Friend informed of developments concerning Air Europe.

Cyclists (Crash Helmets)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Government are currently considering any proposals to make the wearing of crash helmets by cyclists compulsory.

Mr. Chope: No, but we do advise cyclists to wear safety helmets.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statistics he has regarding the beneficial effects of the wearing of crash helmets by cyclists in the prevention of serious head injuries.

Mr. Chope: The standard road injury accident report provides no information on cyclist crash helmets, but hospital-based research suggests that if those seriously injured had worn helmets 11 per cent. would have been uninjured and 18 per cent. would have been only slightly injured.

BR Rolling Stock

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss the performance of British Rail rolling stock during the recent severe weather; and what the results of that meeting were.

Mr. Freeman: Yesterday. British Rail has been carrying out a review of the railway's performance during the recent snow and it plans to announce the results shortly.

M54

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of the M54 in Shropshire what was the original cost, the cost of subsequent repairs and the lowest tender for the orginial construction to have been in tarmacadam rather than concrete.

Mr. Chope: The original construction cost was £26,248,992. Had the lowest tenders for blacktop construction been accepted the extra cost would have been £881,883.

Repair costs to date including those programmed for 1990-91 total £5,303,500. The latter includes bridgeworks and covers part of the Staffordshire section for which Shropshire county council is responsible.

Offshore Standby Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of all standby vessels currently certificated engaged in the offshore oil and gas industries, the year of build and the date of the last survey of each vessel.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am placing in the Library a list of the names of all standby vessels currently certificated engaged in the offshore oil and gas industries, the year of build and the date of the last survey of each vessel.

Motorway Driving

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve lane discipline in motorway driving.

Mr. Chope: My Department continues to attach high importance to improving standards of motorway driving.

As part of the "Safety on the Move" campaign we shall be mounting a fresh publicity initiative later this year about safe motorway driving practice, including lane discipline. This will complement the major police national motorway campaign to be launched in July, aimed at improving motorway driving standards. We have also commissioned research to investigate driver behaviour on motorways to help explore the further scope for improving safety and traffic flows on those roads.

Headlight Dazzle

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to warn motorists of the danger of headlight dazzle.

Mr. Chope: The "Highway Code" advises drivers to dip their headlamps when meeting other vehicles or road users and before they dazzle the driver of a vehicle travelling in the same direction in front of them. The code emphasises that badly adjusted headlamps can dazzle road users and lead to accidents.

Dazzle is also reduced if headlamps are correctly aimed on the vehicle. As I announced last year, the Department is introducing stricter arrangements for checking that new vehicles come off the production line with correctly aimed headlamps. We are also introducing a stricter check of headlamps aim into the MOT test.

A12

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress to date on upgrading the A12 from Ipswich to Great Yarmouth including dualling and bypasses.

Mr. Chope: The proposals to upgrade the A12 in Norfolk and Suffolk have been split into seven schemes. The Gorleston relief road is the most advanced with construction work scheduled to start on 5 April 1991. A preferred route for the Lowestoft relief road, extending the route southward to the Kessingland bypass, was announced on 9 November 1990 and the normal design and statutory procedures are now in hand. We expect to announce preferred routes for all the remaining schemes by 1993 and anticipate that the whole programme of improvements will be completed by the end of the decade.

PRIME MINISTER

Camden

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) of 21 February, *Official Report*, column 434, what place is occupied by Camden in the list of authorities with *(a)* the highest community charge, net of safety net, *(b)* the worst education results and *(c)* the largest rent arrears; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: After it had been capped, reducing its charge by £34, Camden set a community charge of £500 in 1990-91, the third highest in England. After allowing for the effect of the safety net, Camden's charge after capping is £425, the 27th highest in England.

Camden took over responsibility for education in April 1990. Before that it was part of the Inner London education authority which, despite the highest spending per pupil in England, ranked 91st out of 96 local education authorities in terms of education results.

As at 31 March 1990, Camden had arrears of rent of £7·45 million, representing approximately 18 per cent. of the rent roll, the 10th highest level in England.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Books

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what assessment he has made concerning the availability of books for the national curriculum;

(2) how many representations he has received concerning the availability of books for the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The latest report from Her Majesty's senior chief inspector of schools says that most classrooms are adequately provided with books. But some schools will need to offer a wider range of books if they are to meet the full requirements of the national curriculum. That is why the Government are deploying specific grant to support £15 million expenditure on books for the national curriculum in the financial year 1991-92. My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet representatives of the educational publishers from time to time and over the last year have also received six letters about the availability of books from schools and members of the public.

Primary Pupils (Testing)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received concerning primary testing in schools.

Mr. Eggar: Since 1 January this year the Department has received 187 letters from hon. Members and the general public, specifically concerned with the testing of primary school pupils.

CTC/CCTA Funding Agreement

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance or undertakings have been issued, in the event of the provisions of section 105(5) of the Education Reform Act 1988 and paragraph 24A(iv) of the model city technology college/Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency funding agreement being brought into operation on termination of a CTC/CCTA funding agreement, with respect to limitations on the percentage of the then market value of the relevant assets to be repaid to him.

Mr. Eggar: None.

School Governors

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his future plans for the training of school governors.

Mr. Fallon: Legal responsibility for the training of school governors rests with local education authorities, which plan in the light of local needs. This work is encouraged through central grants which will have supported some £17 million of expenditure in the three years to 1992. Grants are expected to continue at least at the same level in 1992-93. The Department will also continue to provide written information and advice to all governors free of charge, including a personal copy of the guide to the law which is regularly updated, and to support and subsidise the production of nationally available training materials.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has carried out any review of the effectiveness of expenditure under the education support grants for training of school governors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: In seeking approval for further instalments of central grant support all LEAs have since 1989 had to report on progress towards their school governor training targets. A survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research in summer 1990 showed that almost all governors had been offered training and over two thirds had attended training sessions. Her Majesty's inspectors of schools published a report in October 1989 on the early experiences of school governor training in a number of LEAs. A further HMI review is now under way and its findings will be published in the early autumn.

Nuclear Structure Facility

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to whether the nuclear structure facility will be subject to peer review before any final decision is made on its future.

Mr. Alan Howarth: At its meeting on 13 March, the Science and Engineering Research Council confirmed its decision to close the nuclear structure facility at its Daresbury laboratory, probably at the beginning of 1993. In reaching this decision the council took full account of the views of its Nuclear Physics Board as well as the representations it had received from the scientific community.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will be represented at the Nuclear Physics European Collaboration Committee meeting in Ruthin in the week beginning 18 March in connection with discussion on the future of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to be represented at this meeting.

Birmingham City Action Team

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many meetings of Birmingham city action team were held in 1990; and how many meetings have been held in the current year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Birmingham city action team meets approximately once a month. It had 10 meetings in 1990 and has had four meetings in the first three months of 1991.

Nursery Schools

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the spending for each local education authority in ranking order for the provision of nursery school places for the last year that figures are available.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* The last year for which expenditure on nursery schools was collected separately was 1986-87. For later years, authorities' returns of expenditure do not identify separate figures for nursery and primary schools.

The table shows school-based recurrent spending on nursery schools. The figures do not include expenditure on nursery classes in primary schools.

Net institutional expenditure[1] in nursery schools 1986-87[2]

LEA	*£000*
ILEA	7,623
Lancashire	2,481
Birmingham	1,987
Durham	1,917
Staffordshire	1,676
Avon	1,628
Berkshire	1,516
Humberside	1,481
Hertfordshire	1,337
Salford	1,166
Bedfordshire	1,021
Derbyshire	938
Manchester	929
Newcastle upon Tyne	862
Sheffield	744
Sunderland	715
Rochdale	666
Stockport	633
Bradford	611
Cumbria	591
Cambridgeshire	554
Liverpool	548
Walsall	541
Cheshire	525
Nottinghamshire	514
Ealing	512
Brent	491
South Tyneside	475
Warwickshire	456
Wolverhampton	438
Dudley	435
Bolton	434
Kirklees	422
Northamptonshire	386
Oxfordshire	385
Surrey	355
Coventry	345
Barnet	344
Wakefield	341
Croydon	339
Tameside	327
Buckinghamshire	325
Waltham Forest	290
North Yorkshire	243
Norfolk	244
Lincolnshire	240
West Sussex	230
Wirral	230
Rotherham	230
North Tyneside	219

LEA	£000
Northumberland	213
Leeds	211
Kingston upon Thames	208
Sandwell	205
East Sussex	199
Sefton	195
Essex	184
Sutton	169
Devon	158
Hampshire	157
Haringey	157
Wigan	154
Bury	142
Bexley	124
Barnsley	112
Shropshire	111
Suffolk	103
Cornwall	94
Calderdale	90
Cleveland	90
Hillingdon	81
Kent	63
St. Helens	60
Gateshead	55
Merton	53
Richmond upon Thames	45
Leicestershire	31
Somerset	7
Barking and Dagenham	0
Bromley	0
Enfield	0
Harrow	0
Havering	0
Hounslow	0
Redbridge	0
Solihull	0
Knowsley	0
Oldham	0
Trafford	0
Doncaster	0
Dorset	0
Gloucestershire	0
Hereford and Worcester	0
Isle of Wight	0
Wiltshire	0
Newham	n/a

Notes:

[1] Net institutional spending includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. The cost of central administration and of financing of capital expenditure is not included.

[2] The figures are taken from authorities' expenditure returns to Government.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the number of nursery school places made available by each local education authority in ranking order for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Information on the number of nursery places is not available centrally. The number of pupils in maintained nursery schools in each local education authority in rank order as at January 1990 is given in the table. This excludes pupils in nursery classes in maintained primary schools.

Number of pupils in maintained nursery schools in rank order January 1990

		Number on roll
1.	Inner London	4,187
2.	Lancashire	3,397
3.	Durham	2,519
4.	Birmingham	2,371
5.	Berkshire	2,119
6.	Staffordshire	1,916
7.	Avon	1,685
8.	Hertfordshire	1,633
9.	Derbyshire	1,549
10.	Bedfordshire	1,356
11.	Humberside	1,007
12.	Sunderland	996
13.	Newham	965
14.	Rochdale	922
15.	Salford	900
16.	Cumbria	881
17.	Oxfordshire	870
18.	Cheshire	839
19.	South Tyneside	827
20.	Wolverhampton	820
21.	Stockport	816
22.	Walsall	780
23.	Warwickshire	758
24.	Sheffield	692
25.	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	689
26.	Cambridgeshire	669
27.	Nottinghamshire	658
28.	Kirklees	619
29.	Northamptonshire	597
30.	Ealing	572
31.	Liverpool	533
32.	Barnet	527
33.	Manchester	521
34.	Buckinghamshire	519
35.	Bradford	518
36.	Bolton	507
37.	Wakefield	469
38.	West Sussex	455
39.	Croydon	432
40.	Coventry	426
41.	Surrey	410
42.	Norfolk	399
43.	Rotherham	357
44.	Hampshire	338
45.	North Yorkshire	334
46.	Tameside	328
47.	Waltham Forest	325
48.	Sefton	319
49.	Dudley	310
50.	Wirral	308
51.	Leeds	299
52.	Lincolnshire	299
53.	East Sussex	298
54.	North Tyneside	292
55.	Devon	276
56.	Brent	267
57.	Essex	252
58.	Haringey	245
59.	Sutton	240
60.	Kingston upon Thames	233
61.	Sandwell	209
62.	Bexley	180
63.	Barnsley	177
64.	Wigan	170
65.	Shropshire	162
66.	Bury	162
67.	Cleveland	156
68.	Northumberland	147
69.	Hillingdon	120
70.	Cornwall	118
71.	Suffolk	97
72.	Kent	80
73.	St. Helens	75
74.	Gateshead	68
75.	Richmond upon Thames	62
76.	Leicestershire	50
77.	Isle of Wight	0
78.	Barking	0
79.	Calderdale	0
80.	Harrow	0
81.	Hounslow	0

		Number on roll
82.	Isles of Scilly	0
83.	Redbridge	0
84.	Bromley	0
85.	Doncaster	0
86.	Somerset	0
87.	Dorset	0
88.	Gloucestershire	0
89.	Enfield	0
90.	Trafford	0
91.	Havering	0
92.	Solihull	0
93.	Oldham	0
94.	Merton	0
95.	Hereford and Worcester	0
96.	Wiltshire	0
97.	Knowsley	0
	England	51,678

Note:
(i) Includes full time and part time pupils
(ii) Zeros indicate authorities with no nursery schools.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the required level of value added tax if the amount of tax levied through the community charge were collected through the VAT system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 13 March at columns *553-54*.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the additional revenue that would be generated by raising to 25 per cent. the VAT rate on those products which were historically subject to a 25 per cent. purchase tax levy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Around £5 billion at 1990-91 levels of expenditure.

Company Cars

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the basis of environmental considerations concerning the cost of subsidies by the Exchequer towards the costs of company cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I have received a number of such representations.

Interest Rates

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a table showing for each year from 1979 to 1991 to date, the average real short-term interest rate in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the Group of Seven as a whole, measuring the real United Kingdom interest rate in each case on the basis of the underlying rate of inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Following is the information:

Per cent.

Year	United Kingdom	G7
1979	1·2	0·0
1980	−0·1	0·1
1981	2·1	3·6
1982	3·6	4·5
1983	4·9	4·6
1984	5·3	5·0
1985	6·9	4·6
1986	7·4	4·9
1987	6·0	3·8
1988	5·7	3·8
1989	7·8	4·5
1990	7·1	4·3

Sources:
OECD, CSO and national sources.

Inflation

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a table for each year from 1970 to 1990 inclusive, showing *(a)* the average underlying rate of inflation in the United Kingdom, *(b)* the average rate of inflation in the United States and *(c)* the amount by which underlying United Kingdom inflation exceeds United States inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There are various ways of measuring underlying inflation. The following table shows the United Kingdom figures as measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments and the community charge/rates. These figures are available only from 1976.

Average annual increase in consumer prices

	United Kingdom[1] Per cent.	United States of America Per cent.	Difference Per cent.
1976	16·9	5·7	11·2
1977	16·0	6·5	9·5
1978	8·5	7·6	0·9
1979	12·5	11·3	1·2
1980	16·7	13·5	3·2
1981	11·7	10·3	1·4
1982	8·3	6·1	2·2
1983	5·1	3·2	1·9
1984	4·4	4·3	0·1
1985	5·0	3·5	1·5
1986	3·3	1·9	1·4
1987	3·5	3·7	−0·2
1988	4·4	4·1	0·3
1989	5·7	4·8	0·9
1990	7·2	5·4	1·8

[1] All items RPI excluding mortgage interest payments and community charge/rates.

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average annual underlying rate of United Kingdom inflation for the periods *(a)* from July 1983 to October 1989 inclusive, *(b)* from July 1984 to October 1990 inclusive, *(c)* from July 1985 to October 1991 inclusive, using as a proxy for October 1991 the forecast for the fourth quarter of 1991 published in the 1991 FSBR, adjusted to provide a forecast for the underlying rate, and *(d)* from July 1985 to the latest available month, inclusive.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The average annual increase in the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments and the community charge was:

(i) 4·4 per cent. between July 1983 and October 1989 inclusive;
(ii) 4·4 per cent. between July 1984 and October 1990 inclusive;

(iii) 4·8 per cent. between July 1985 and January 1991 inclusive.

No forecast is published for underlying inflation.

Public Sector Borrowing

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total public sector borrowing requirement for *(a)* the period from June 1979 to June 1983 inclusive, *(b)* the period from July 1983 to October 1989 inclusive and *(c)* the period from November 1989 to the latest available month, inclusive.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The figures are as follows:

	£ million
(a) June 1979 to June 1983	40·5
(b) July 1983 to October 1989	4·6
(c) November 1989 to February 1991	−8·3

WALES

Special Schools

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how the weighting accorded to the number of statemented pupils on the rolls of special schools is expected to influence the integration of pupils with special educational needs into ordinary schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Education Act 1981 places a duty on local education authorities to secure that children with statements are educated in ordinary schools, subject to certain conditions. Wherever a child with a statement is placed, it is the responsibility of the LEA to ensure that the special educational provision specified in the statement is made and to allocate resources accordingly.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the ports in Wales currently registered for the import of toxic waste and the amount of such waste imported, by port, for the last available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There is no requirement for ports to be registered for the importation of waste. The following amounts of hazardous waste were imported through ports in Wales for the year to March 1991: 156 tonnes through Holyhead, 1,346 tonnes through Newport and 5 tonnes through Swansea.

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the perinatal mortality rate for the years 1986-87 to the present for (1) West Wales general hospital, Carmarthen, (2) Withybush hospital, Haverfordwest, (3) Singleton hospital, Swansea, (4) Morriston hospital and (5) Wales; and what information he has on comparable figures for Great Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Perinatal mortality rates on a hospital basis are not available centrally.

Data from the registration system which are routinely published on an area of residence basis are reproduced in the following table with equivalent rates for Great Britain.

Perinatal Mortality Rates[1]

Area of mother's usual residence[2]	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Great Britain	9·6	8·9	8·7	8·4
Wales	10·3	9·2	8·6	8·3
District Health Authority Area				
East Dyfed	12·5	10·1	9·1	9·5
Pembrokeshire	[3]8·0	[3]8·2	[3]13·4	[3]8·9
West Glamorgan	10·1	9·5	8·4	7·6

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

[1] Rates are perinatal deaths (stillbirths and deaths within the first week after birth) per 1,000 total (live and still) births.

[2] Not necessarily the area of delivery or death.

[3] Care should be taken in interpretation of these rates calculated from fewer than 20 events.

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of officers in each grade, 1 to 7, and overall in his Department are women.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on 7 March 1991 at columns *233-34*.

Air Pollution

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to operate air pollution monitoring sites in Wales on behalf of the Government in respect of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, atmospheric hydrocarbon, trace germs, atmospheric chemistry and multi-element sites; and if he will list other monitoring by independent organisations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The coverage and density of the United Kingdom monitoring networks for airborne pollutants is kept under continual review. We are now planning to expand the network, as announced in the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance". As a first step we propose an improved urban system which will monitor carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and a range of atmospheric hydrocarbons, and will include a site in Wales.

There is no centrally maintained list of monitoring by independent organisations.

Housing Association Consultancy and Advisory Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many draft reports by HACAS in respect of Corlan Housing Association were presented to Tai Cymru before the final version; and what was the final fee paid to HACAS.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I will ask the chairman of Tai Cymru to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Rehabilitation Seating

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services health authority regarding *(a)* waiting lists, *(b)* funding requirements and *(c)* the method of transfer payment appropriate from 1 April, for rehabilitation seating provided by the rehabilitation engineering unit at Rookwood hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. Management and financial responsibility for the rehabilitation engineering unit rests with the South Glamorgan health authority.

South Glamorgan Hospitals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consideration he gave, prior to his approval of South Glamorgan health authority's proposals to transfer services provided at Glan Ely hospital to the Prince of Wales hospital at Rhydlafar to *(a)* the capacity of the foul drains at the Prince of Wales hospital to accept sluicings from the disposable bed pan mashing equipment currently used at Glan Ely hospital and *(b)* the cross-infection risk between geriatric and non-geriatric patients in physiotherapy and occupational therapy departments;

(2) what consideration he gave, prior to his approval of South Glamorgan health authority's proposals to transfer services provided at the children's ENT hospital, Ely, to the University Hospital of Wales, to (i) the recent medical audit report on the relative costs of children's ENT operations at the children's ENT hospital, Ely, and (ii) the involuntary departures of the unit general manager, chief nursing officer, chief finance officer and chief personnel officer from the University Hospital of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The considerations given to the authority's proposals are set out in the decision letter issued on 7 March.

Changes in senior personnel at University Hospital of Wales are a matter for South Glamorgan health authority, which advises that a number of staff are moving as part of an agreed programme to strengthen financial and clinical management as the authority prepares for the NHS changes in April.

I regret that the hon. Gentleman has used parliamentary privilege to make careless, unfounded insinuations against public officials. I hope that in future he will ensure that any statements he makes have been verified.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Glan Ely hospital and St. David's hospital, Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: At present, neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans to visit these hospitals.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the children's ward at Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I visited the ward on 15 March.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Maternity Provision

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost per annum of Britain's current maternity provision; and what this figure is as a percentage of the national payroll.

Mr. Jack: The total estimated cost of financial provision for maternity in the 1990-91 year is £395 million made up as follows:

	£ million
Statutory Maternity Pay	340
State Maternity Allowance	34
Social Fund Maternity payments	21

In addition, there are costs to industry resulting from the right of those women employees who meet the relevant qualifying conditions to return to work after maternity absence. It is difficult to estimate these costs, but they may reasonably be expected to be in the range £200 million to £300 million per annum.

It is estimated that the cost to industry and the state is in the range 0·17 to 0·2 per cent. of total labour costs over the economy as a whole which are running at well over £300 billion.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the £35 disregard in income from occupational pensions above which unemployment benefit is reduced for people over the age of 55 years.

Mr. Jack: We have no plans to increase the disregard.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the real-term value of the £35 disregard on income from occupational pensions above which unemployment benefit is abated for people over the age of 55 years in relation to its level in 1981.

Mr. Jack: If the disregard had been increased in line with the RPI at January 1991 it would be £61·50.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give details of the functions to be assessed by the functional test on the disability working allowance; and which disability organisations he has consulted regarding the details of the test;

(2) whether his Department has drafted details of the functional test on the disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: The test of functional disability for the disability working allowance—DWA—will be based upon the method of assessing disability developed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for its survey of disabled people in Great Britain. Research is currently under way to ensure that the test, which will use claimants' own assessment of their abilities, works satisfactorily. Very early indications are that a large majority of disabled people are happy to complete a self-assessment form similar to the one we have in mind for DWA. The research should be completed in April 1991.

Our proposals were developed in the light of discussions between officials and representatives of a number of disability organisations and other experts in the field.

Pensions

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reach a social security agreement with Caribbean countries to enable those retiring there to receive annual increments to their old age pension.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom has a reciprocal social security agreement with Jamaica which provides for the payment of annual pension increases. Negotiations for an agreement with Barbados are nearly complete. This will provide for future pension increases to be paid after the agreement comes into force. We have no plans to negotiate agreements with any of the other Caribbean countries.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those countries which have a reciprocal agreement with Britain which ensures that retired people who are entitled to a British pension receive an annual increase.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom has reciprocal social security agreements, providing for the payment of annual pension increases, with the following countries:

Austria	Jamaica
Belgium	Jersey
Bermuda	Luxembourg
Cyprus	Malta
Finland	Mauritius
France	Netherlands
Germany	Philippines
Gibraltar	Portugal
Guernsey	Spain
Iceland	Sweden
Ireland	Switzerland
Isle of Man	Turkey
Israel	United States of America
Italy	Yugoslavia

Pension increases are also paid to pensioners living in Sark by virtue of a provision of the Social Security (Persons Abroad) Regulations 1975.

Darnley Estate, Glasgow

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the visit by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), to Darnley housing estate in Glasgow on 1 March and on the conditions and problems he encountered there.

Mr. Jack: The Darnley housing estate was one of a number of locations visited within the catchment area of the Glasgow Southside social security office. These brief visits provided a useful insight into the social and economic conditions being faced by those receiving various forms of benefits from this well-run local office.

Care Home Trusts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance he has given to local adjudication officers dealing with claims for income support to enable them to determine whether or not a local authority has placed the claimants in a care home trust.

Miss Widdecombe: Eligibility for income support is defined by regulations and is available in respect of fees, up to certain limits, to residents of registered residential care homes and in certain other types of homes. Independent ajudication officers receive guidance on the interpretation of the regulations by the chief adjudication officer in the "Adjudication Officers Guide", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 12 February concerning Mr. Walker.

Mr. Scott: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

Social Fund

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the 1991-92 discretionary social fund budget, giving details of the allocations that will be made to each of the district offices.

Mr. Scott: The 1991-92 gross budget for the discretionary part of the social fund will be £227·7 million, comprising £160 million for loans and £67·7 million for community care grants. In accordance with the Department's published commitment to move to a formal cash limit on the discretionary part of the fund, agreement has been reached with the Treasury that, with effect from the start of the financial year, it will be subject to a formal cash limit of £100 million net. I have placed a list of all district office allocations in the Library.

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments were made from the social fund in 1988-89 and 1989-90 analysed by type of payment.

Mr. Scott *[pursuant to his reply, 5 March 1991, c. 124]:* I regret that the answer given was incomplete. The full answer should have been:

Payments were as follows:

thousands

	1988-89	*1989-90*
Maternity payments	170	175
Funeral payments	40	45
Community care grants	155	230
Budget loans	505	580
Crisis loans	380	450
Cold weather payments	1	45

It should be noted that the figures for payments in 1988-89 given in the recent social security departmental report—Cm. 1514—were incorrect; the figures given above should be substituted. Arrangements have been made for a correction slip to be produced. This will be inserted in remaining HMSO stocks of the departmental report and sent to all known purchasers. Copies will also be sent to the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Broadcasting

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EC directive on transfrontier broadcasting will be incorporated into the United Kingdom law.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Article 25 of the directive requires member states to bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to implement its provisions not later than 3 October 1991. We shall comply with this requirement. To the extent that new statutory powers are necessary for this purpose these were included in the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has held with the Advertising Standards Authority regarding the EC directive on transfrontier broadcasting.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office consulted a wide range of advertising interests about the relevant provisions

of the EC directive while it was under negotiation, but since television advertising is not within the remit of the Advertising Standards Authority it was not appropriate to include the authority in these consultations.

Circuses

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he plans to introduce legislation concerning the treatment of animals in circuses.

Mrs. Rumbold: Circus animals are protected by the Protection of Animals Act 1911 as well as the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925. These Acts together provide for, among other things, the registration of trainers, the inspection of premises by local authorities and the prosecution of anyone who causes any animal unnecessary suffering. This gives circus animals both general and specific protection and we have no plans for further legislation.

Animals (Scientific Procedures)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of his Department's inspectorate of scientific procedures on living animals on 31 December 1990 were based in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: These figures are routinely given in the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain"—table 28 in 1989: Cm. 1152. On 31 December 1990, there were 19 members of the Home Office animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate in post. Sixteen inspectors were based in London and the regional offices in England; and three in the office in Scotland. There is no office in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to publish annually the number of designated places for scientific procedures on living animals in each of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statistics on the number of certificates of designation issued each year under section 6 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and of the number of such certificates in force in Great Britain, are published annually in the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals"—table 29 in 1989: Cm 1152—and in chapter 2 of the annual reports of the Animal Procedures Committee. There are no plans to disaggregate this information on a more localised basis.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if his Department has evaluated or will evaluate the number of additional animals, by species, that will be used in medical research in order to meet the regulatory requirements for the licensing of new human medical products imposed by EC draft directive (III 9026/90/Rev 1) if implemented;

(2) if his Department has evaluated or will evaluate the number of additional animals, by species, that will be used in medical research in order to meet the regulatory requirements for the licensing of new veterinary products imposed by EC draft directive (III 9026/90/Rev 1) if implemented.

Mrs. Rumbold: The task of the Home Office is to license and regulate scientific procedures on living animals under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. My right hon. Friend is not in a position to estimate in advance the number of project licences which may be sought, or the number of procedures authorised by those licences which may be carried out, for any particular purpose.

Animal Cruelty

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals about the case for new legislation to prevent those convicted of cruelty to animals being able lawfully to own domestic pets.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have recently received a letter giving notice that the society will be seeking a mandatory ban on keeping animals in future for those convicted of certain types of offences of cruelty to animals. I understand that such a ban might well go beyond disqualifying offenders from keeping domestic pets.

Trevi Group

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of United Kingdom involvement in the Trevi Group in each of the last three years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Trevi Group will produce a policy paper for public discussion on the interpretation of police practices in the EC.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: There are no such proposals. The purpose of Trevi is to develop practical police co-operation among European Community member states. A range of measures currently under consideration in Trevi is outlined in the programme of action approved in Dublin on 15 June 1990, a copy of which is in the Library.

Siobhan McKane

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will change the category of Siobhan McKane from A to B; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Siobhan McKane has been placed temporarily in category A in the light of the offence with which she is charged. This categorisation will be kept under review. No prisoner is held in category A for any longer than is considered necessary.

Bedding Material

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children under the age of five years have been involved in fires due to bedding material in each year since 1980; and what proportion of the children died as a result of the fires.

Mr. John Patten: The readily available information is shown in the table.

Children aged under 5 injured in accidental dwelling fires attended by local authority fire brigades, where the material first ignited was bedding[1] 1981-89 (United Kingdom)

Year	Number of casualties			Percentage of casualties leading to death
	Fatal	Non-fatal	Total	
1981	6	45	51	12
1982	9	55	64	14
1983	5	67	72	7
1984	5	90	95	5
1985	10	77	87	11
1986	14	86	100	14
1987	16	86	102	16
1988	10	73	83	12
1989	12	97	109	11

[1] Bedding is defined as all bedding on the bed including mattress covers, but not beds or mattresses or cases where the electrical insulation of an electric blanket first ignited.

Source: Home Office Fire Statistics.

Foreign Prisoners

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of the whole prison population convicted of drugs and related offences at 1 February were foreign nationals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest information which is readily available centrally relates to sentenced prisoners, excluding fine defaulters, on 30 June 1990 convicted of drugs offences. Of 3,160 such prisoners about 1,260—40 per cent.—were recorded as foreign nationals; nationality was not recorded for some 80—3 per cent.

We are planning to publicise abroad the long prison sentences which drug smugglers can expect on conviction in this country in the hope that this may dissuade some foreign nationals from bringing drugs into the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, from the convicted prison population on 1 February, what were the total numbers and percentages of the whole of *(a)* non-British EC nationals and *(b)* non-EC nationals.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest information which is readily available centrally relates to sentenced prisoners, excluding fine defaulters on 30 June 1990. Of 34,880 such prisoners about 630—1·8 per cent.—were recorded as non-British EC nationals and about 2,540—7·3 per cent. —were recorded as non-EC nationals; nationality was not recorded for some 2,600—7·4 per cent. Around 420 of the EC nationals were recorded as nationals of the Republic of Ireland, but the information is not completely reliable because it depends upon information provided by the prisoner.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to return to country of origin all convicted foreign nationals in prisons unless there are compelling reasons to hold them in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will bring forward a scheme for automatic repatriation of convicted drugs offenders who are non-British nationals with a lifetime ban on return to the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: Arrangements already exist under the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons, to which most European countries, the United States of America and Canada are party, for the repatriation of prisoners to complete custodial sentences in their own countries. We expect to be in a position before long to join the Commonwealth scheme which will provide for prisoners to be transferred between the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries which may join the scheme. However, repatriations under these and any other international arrangements to which we may subscribe under the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 require the consent of the prisoner and of both governments concerned.

The Immigration Act 1971 provides powers to deport those subject to immigration control who are convicted of criminal offences in this country. In particular, the courts may recommend deportation in addition to imposing a term of imprisonment. A deportation order, once made, bars re-entry to the United Kingdom for as long as it remains in force.

The Gulf

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the International Communist party about the arrest of any of its members during an anti-Gulf war demonstration in London on 27 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. There were no arrests.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons, by nationality, were refused entry to the United Kingdom at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Dover in each month in 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 March 1991]:* The available information is given in the tables. Not all the passengers have been removed from the United Kingdom.

Numbers of passengers refused leave to enter at Heathrow by nationality and month, 1990

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
European Community													
Belgium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Denmark	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	3
France	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	3
Germany[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	3	3
Greece	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3
Italy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	3
Luxembourg	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Netherlands	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Portugal	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	5	[2]—	[1]—	14
Spain	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Western Europe (excluding EC)													
Austria	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	32
Cyprus	8	13	7	[2]—	5	10	7	6	13	15	8	[2]—	99
Finland	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	22
Malta	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—	[3]—
Norway	6	—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	7	5	[2]—	—	36
Sweden	8	7	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	7	8	[2]—	—	57
Switzerland	[2]—	7	[2]—	[2]—	—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	7	—	35
Turkey	50	40	33	22	15	25	24	17	19	15	15	20	295
Yugoslavia	41	28	38	39	22	26	43	37	31	40	24	34	403
Eastern Europe													
Bulgaria	—	13	[2]—	[2]—	—	9	[2]—	5	[2]—	5	—	[2]—	41
Czechoslovakia	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	7	—	22
G.D.R.	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Hungary	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	9	10	10	42
Poland	[2]—	10	7	6	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	47
Romania	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	13
USSR	7	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	13	—	19	8	10	8	10	10	91
Americas													
Argentina	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	29
Barbados	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	20
Brazil	26	40	55	34	33	40	23	38	31	42	33	38	433
Canada	8	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	6	7	5	10	7	9	6	70
Chile	—	—	5	[2]—	—	5	7	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	30
Colombia	10	9	22	31	25	17	24	16	11	19	21	23	228
Cuba	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guyana	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	[2]—	—	6	11	6	5	46
Jamaica	32	27	33	28	31	29	30	26	35	41	10	7	329
Mexico	[2]—	—	5	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	5	[2]—	26
Peru	12	5	[2]—	5	6	5	[2]—	[2]—	6	5	6	[2]—	61
Trinidad & Tobago	7	9	7	6	8	[2]—	9	[2]—	14	11	5	8	92
USA	57	41	43	51	35	32	38	31	39	43	34	30	474
Uruguay	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Venezuela	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	9	38
Africa													
Algeria	148	139	153	9	15	5	17	11	8	7	7	6	525
Egypt	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	27
Ethiopia	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	8	5	5	5	8	38
Ghana	29	23	17	16	19	25	21	24	32	21	15	34	276
Kenya	13	11	16	16	13	14	16	9	16	20	17	13	174
Libya	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	—	[2]—	26
Mauritius	16	11	13	13	9	12	12	14	9	14	15	9	147
Morocco	27	30	59	15	12	12	18	15	14	13	6	12	233
Nigeria	46	37	35	29	24	33	46	33	42	59	64	80	528
Sierra Leone	6	8	[2]—	5	6	[2]—	[2]—	12	6	[2]—	5	12	74
Somalia	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	5	5	[2]—	[2]—	6	—	33
South Africa	18	22	26	22	18	17	16	22	21	12	15	11	220
Sudan	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
Tanzania	10	[2]—	8	6	5	[2]—	7	[2]—	9	[2]—	8	6	72
Tunisia	8	15	16	7	9	11	5	5	[2]—	5	8	8	99
Uganda	[2]—	7	19	18	18	21	12	17	21	18	14	23	190
Zambia	9	7	8	9	9	6	5	[2]—	[2]—	10	6	7	83
Zimbabwe	7	9	5	8	10	15	12	14	6	8	9	17	120
Asia													
Indian sub-continent													
Bangladesh	25	24	11	27	26	25	16	28	29	26	19	54	310
India	35	18	49	19	40	38	32	31	32	26	20	27	367
Pakistan	19	17	26	13	20	24	47	20	34	30	14	22	286
Middle East													
Iran	25	13	18	6	24	39	48	26	38	30	16	38	321
Iraq	[2]—	—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	9	22	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	53
Israel	6	[2]—	8	6	9	5	[2]—	10	9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	72
Jordan	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	20
Kuwait	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Lebanon	—	6	8	8	6	5	[2]—	[2]—	8	11	11	7	78
Saudi Arabia	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	14
Syria	13	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	42

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Remainder of Asia													
China	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	10	—	10	—	[2]—	7	5	41
Indonesia	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	13	21
Japan	12	6	12	8	6	12	[2]—	5	6	7	[2]—	[2]—	86
Malaysia	10	29	17	42	34	33	20	30	35	24	28	51	353
Philippines	[2]—	12	8	[2]—	10	6	7	9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	70
Singapore	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	36
Sri Lanka	9	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	8	[2]—	5	5	12	58
Thailand	[2]—	5	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	10	[2]—	—	—	28
Hong Kong BDTC	[2]—	6	8	10	9	11	8	13	10	6	9	6	99
Australasia													
Australia	10	[2]—	16	5	11	10	5	12	8	[2]—	9	[2]—	97
New Zealand	5	6	7	[2]—	14	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	7	6	[2]—	61
British Overseas Citizens	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	28
Other countries not specified elsewhere	40	34	55	36	29	52	65	55	62	56	43	48	575
Stateless	17	17	23	22	23	31	32	24	15	21	28	35	288
All nationalities	886	815	953	658	691	759	810	740	818	794	678	832	9,434

[1] Unified Germany from 3 October 1990.
[2]— Between 1 and 4.
[3]— Between 1 and 9.

Numbers of passengers refused leave to enter at Gatwick by nationality and month, 1990

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
European Community													
Belgium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Denmark	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
France	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Germany[1]	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—
Greece	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Italy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Luxembourg	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Portugal	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
Spain	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
Western Europe (excluding EC)													
Austria	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	24
Cyprus	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Finland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Malta	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[3]—
Norway	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	12
Sweden	6	[2]—	[2]—	—	7	[3]—	5	[2]—	—	6	5	[2]—	37
Switzerland	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	5	—	[2]—	22
Turkey	10	[2]—	[2]—	9	5	5	7	10	11	14	27	11	116
Yugoslavia	7	9	18	14	22	20	14	10	12	21	23	13	183
Eastern Europe													
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Czechoslovakia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[3]—
G.D.R.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—
Poland	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Romania	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
USSR	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
Americas													
Argentina	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	13
Barbados	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	12
Brazil	6	[2]—	8	5	13	5	[2]—	9	8	10	9	[2]—	85
Canada	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	25
Chile	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	14
Colombia	9	[2]—	8	11	21	9	14	[2]—	[2]—	11	13	13	117
Cuba	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Cuyana	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—	10
Jamaica	16	21	19	12	21	16	15	6	19	23	50	41	259
Mexico	6	[2]—	6	—	[2]—	9	6	5	8	7	[2]—	6	64
Peru	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	22
Trinidad & Tobago	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	15

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
USA	50	33	47	40	49	40	47	31	50	65	38	32	522
Uruguay	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Venezuela	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Africa													
Algeria	7	[2]—	12	6	—	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	39
Egypt	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[3]—
Ghana	20	[2]—	11	18	16	13	7	14	10	7	8	15	141
Kenya	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	16
Libya	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Mauritius	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	17
Morocco	32	15	63	13	[2]—	[2]—	9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	11	164
Nigeria	18	13	20	21	30	14	21	30	36	46	39	46	334
Sierra Leone	13	6	[2]—	9	11	10	18	19	15	35	13	24	177
Somalia	19	7	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	36
South Africa	8	5	18	7	9	8	13	12	7	10	8	5	110
Sudan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Tanzania	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	10
Tunisia	7	5	10	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	33
Uganda	22	26	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	62
Zambia	10	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	31
Zimbabwe	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	9	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	7	[2]—	[2]—	34
Asia													
Indian sub-continent													
Bangladesh	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
India	[2]—	5	[2]—	17	5	[2]—	[2]—	12	8	7	[2]—	9	76
Pakistan	5	15	[2]—	[2]—	5	7	9	17	19	17	16	16	131
Middle East													
Iran	5	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	7	[2]—	7	9	7	[2]—	12	59
Iraq	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	5	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	11
Israel	9	[2]—	5	6	8	5	7	12	5	10	6	7	84
Jordan	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[3]—
Kuwait	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	[2]—	12	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	25
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]—
Syria	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[3]—
Remainder of Asia													
China	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	10	[2]—	20
Indonesia	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[3]—
Japan	13	[2]—	[2]—	5	7	7	[2]—	11	7	[2]—	[2]—	6	72
Malaysia	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	9	6	7	13	[2]—	[2]—	52
Philippines	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	19	[2]—	10	7	9	[2]—	[2]—	11	68
Singapore	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Sri Lanka	[2]—	9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	8	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	41
Thailand	—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Hong Kong BDTC	5	6	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	5	[2]—	8	43
Australasia													
Australia	6	5	[2]—	5	[2]—	5	[2]—	8	7	12	5	6	69
New Zealand	[2]—	[2]—	10	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	40
British Overseas Citizens	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	5	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	18
Other countries not specified elsewhere	32	9	26	25	29	43	28	21	25	35	33	34	340
Stateless	6	7	13	16	16	13	13	12	27	21	17	32	193
All nationalities	395	271	353	280	367	290	324	327	361	450	390	408	4,216

[1] Unified Germany from 3 October 1990.
[2]— Between 1 and 4.
[3]— Between 1 and 9.

Numbers of passengers refused leave to enter at Dover by nationality and month, 1990

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
European Community													
Belgium	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
France	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	13
Germany[1]	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Greece	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
Italy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[3]
Luxembourg	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	—	[2]	[3]	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	19
Portugal	5	5	[2]	—	—	[2]	—	[2]	5	—	—	[2]	21
Spain	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	[3]
Western Europe (excluding EC)													
Austria	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	[2]	6	[2]	[2]	[2]	31
Cyprus	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	14
Finland	—	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	[2]	[3]
Malta	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[3]
Norway	[2]	—	[2]	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	—	[2]	—	[3]
Sweden	[2]	—	[3]	[2]	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	26
Switzerland	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	22
Turkey	[2]	[2]	[2]	6	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	7	7	11	52
Yugoslavia	15	19	18	19	30	13	34	22	22	14	12	8	226
Eastern Europe													
Bulgaria	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	6	15
Czechoslovakia	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	6	34	14	7	75
G.D.R.	—	[2]	[2]	—	34	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	43
Hungary	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	19	10	6	47
Poland	—	—	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	23
Romania	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	[3]
USSR	[2]	—	—	[2]	5	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	16
Americas													
Argentina	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	—	7	[2]	[2]	24
Barbados	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
Brazil	9	16	7	16	24	22	19	10	19	35	23	21	221
Canada	[2]	[2]	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	27
Chile	—	—	—	[2]	5	[2]	5	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	18
Colombia	17	19	16	31	23	53	19	34	10	28	10	7	267
Cuba	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guyana	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	[2]	[3]
Jamaica	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	—	10
Mexico	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	5	6	8	[2]	[2]	38
Peru	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	5	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	36
Trinidad & Tobago	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
USA	13	[2]	9	14	19	21	16	24	27	28	22	12	207
Uruguay	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	[3]
Venezuela	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[3]
Africa													
Algeria	74	56	46	[2]	11	13	[2]	[2]	[2]	10	9	8	222
Egypt	—	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
Ghana	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	—	6	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	24
Kenya	—	—	—	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	—	—	[2]	[3]
Libya	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mauritius	6	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	7	5	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	9	51
Morocco	28	19	17	7	6	[2]	9	10	10	[2]	[2]	[2]	118
Nigeria	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	35
Sierra Leone	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	17
Somalia	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[3]
South Africa	6	11	15	15	9	11	18	15	14	18	16	12	160
Sudan	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[2]	—	—	[3]
Tanzania	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	[3]
Tunisia	[2]	[2]	6	[2]	—	[2]	8	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	34
Uganda	—	5	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	17
Zambia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[3]
Zimbabwe	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	[3]
Indian sub-continent													
Bangladesh	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[3]
India	—	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	—	—	—	6	17
Pakistan	[2]	—	[2]	[3]	—	[2]	—	5	[3]	[2]	—	—	13
Middle East													
Iran	—	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]
Iraq	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Israel	5	[2]	[2]	[2]	5	[2]	6	10	[2]	7	9	[2]	54
Jordan	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	—	[2]
Kuwait	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	—	—	—	[2]	—	—	[2]	—	[2]	[2]	—	—	[3]

Geographical region/ Nationality	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Syria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Remainder of Asia													
China	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	5	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—
Indonesia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Japan	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	5	6	9	7	7	—	[2]—	51
Malaysia	[2]—	8	6	16	43	34	20	11	40	24	5	18	226
Philippines	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	[3]—
Singapore	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—	10
Sri Lanka	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—
Thailand	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	[3]—
Hong Kong BDTC	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	21	[2]—	8	10	11	[2]—	[2]—	72
Australasia													
Australia	—	—	—	[2]—	6	7	5	[3]—	8	8	5	[2]—	50
New Zealand	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	—	[2]—	20
British Overseas Citizens	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	5
Other countries not specified elsewhere	9	17	18	21	51	25	12	18	24	12	12	17	236
Stateless	28	42	5	51	57	46	53	47	49	55	63	73	569
All nationalities	253	263	214	275	378	340	311	322	321	389	278	286	3,630

[1] Unified Germany from 3 October 1990.
[2]— Between 1 and 4.
[3]— Between 1 and 9.

HEALTH

Food Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library details of written representations received on *(a)* food safety and food hygiene, and *(b)* hygiene training in relation to the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: All regulations and codes of practice made under the Food Safety Act 1990 have been published in draft form for consultation with interested parties. We have received large numbers of responses to these consultation exercises. It is not normally our practice to make public details of the responses received. A list of organisations which responded to last year's consultation exercise on hygiene training for food handlers has been placed in the Library.

West Suffolk District Health Authority

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available to West Suffolk district health authority in each of the past five financial years; what approximate percentage of these new resources has been used for hospital services; what are the numbers of medical and other NHS staff employed in hospitals in the area in each of the last five years; and how many patients have been treated.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about funds made available to individual district health authorities is held centrally only in terms of expenditure. Details of total expenditure on hospital and community health services—HCHS—in West Suffolk district health authority and of the percentage used for hospital services are as follows:

Total revenue and capital expenditure

	Revenue expenditure Total	Revenue expenditure Hospital services as a percentage of total	Capital expenditure
	£000 cash		£000 cash
1985-86	33,173	82·97	3,469
1986-87	36,121	82·91	3,008
1987-88	40,215	79·44	1,796
1988-89	44,974	79·29	2,503
1989-90	49,164	79·14	2,619

Staff Numbers

The numbers of medical and other NHS staff employed in hospitals in the West Suffolk area are given in the table. Figures given are for whole-time equivalents, as at 30 September each year. Numbers of staff at senior doctor level, for example, consultants, employed in hospitals in the West Suffolk area are not held centrally since the contracts for these staff are held by the East Anglian regional health authority. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Colin Walker for district-level information.

West Suffolk DHA—Hospital Junior Medical Staff

Year	Number
1985	74·8
1986	77·4
1987	70·3
1988	76·5
1989	73·0

Figures exclude all locum staff.

East Anglian RHA—Hospital Senior Medical Staff

Year	Number
1985	517·6
1986	561·7
1987	518·4
1988	586·7
1989	612·0

Figures exclude all locum staff.

West Suffolk DHA—NHS Hospital based Non-Medical Staff

Year	Number
1985	2,580
1986	2,580
1987	2,640
1988	2,640
1989	2,700

Figures include nursing and midwifery agency staff.

Number of patients treated

The information requested is as follows:

Finished hospital stays: West Suffolk health authority

Year	Discharges and deaths
1985	25,426
1986	25,503
1987-88	26,401
1988-89	27,046

Year	Finished consultant episodes
1988-89	31,904
1989-90	33,942

Pharmaceutical Companies (Sponsorship)

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards initiatives by a family health services authority in seeking financial sponsorship from pharmaceutical companies for updates of its local formulary for general practitioners at the same time as it is asking the companies for information about their products for possible inclusion in the formulary; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We would not expect family health services authorities (FHSAs) to seek sponsorship from pharmaceutical companies for locally produced formularies. We are aware that there was a suggestion of this in the area of the hon. Member's constituency, but the relevant FHSA has since made clear that it is not seeking financial support.

Electoral Statistics

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of electors in each parish, town and city council ward in the county of Hampshire.

Mr. Dorrell: Returns containing numbers on the 1991 electoral registers in Hampshire are still being processed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. An analysis of local government electors by county and district will be published in "OPCS Monitor EL 91/1" at the end of April. An analysis of parliamentary electors by constituency will be placed in the Library by 10 May and published in "Electoral Statistics 1991"—Series EL No. 18—by the end of July. This year, to facilitate the work of the parliamentary boundary commissions, an analysis of parliamentary electors is being prepared by ward. These figures will be placed in the Library as soon as practicable after 10 May.

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the rate per thousand of perinatal deaths for each district within the county of Cumbria;

(2) what is the average rate per thousand for perinatal deaths for those districts which comprise the Northern region.

Mr. Dorrell: The overall perinatal death rate for the northern region is 9·2. The table gives the number of births, perinatal deaths and the perinatal death rate for each component district. It also includes the arithmetic average of these rates, unadjusted for the number of births.

Perinatal mortality, [2]Northern Region, 1989

	Total births	Perinatal deaths	Perinatal rate
Tyne and Wear	14,569	146	10·0
Gateshead	2,600	34	13·1
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,504	29	8·3
North Tyneside	2,377	22	9·3
South Tyneside	2,043	19	[1]9·3
Sunderland	4,045	42	10·4
Cleveland	8,015	73	9·1
Hartlepool	1,297	10	[1]7·7
Langbaurgh on Tees	1,950	21	10·8
Middlesbrough	2,245	21	9·4
Stockton on Tees	2,523	21	8·3
Cumbria	5,819	46	7·9
Allerdale	1,083	16	[1]14·8
Barrow in Furness	1,003	7	[1]7·0
Carlisle	1,291	7	[1]5·4
Copeland	1,001	5	[1]5·0
Eden	494	3	[1]6·1
South Lakeland	947	8	[1]8·4
Durham	7,397	64	8·7

	Total births	Perinatal deaths	Perinatal rate
Chester le Street	622	5	[1]8·0
Darlington	1,352	12	[1]8·9
Derwentside	1,008	12	[1]11·9
Durham	882	10	[1]11·3
Easington	1,322	9	[1]6·8
Sedgefield	1,127	6	[1]5·3
Teesdale	269	2	[1]7·4
Wear Valley	815	8	[1]9·8
Northumberland	3,497	33	9·4
Alnwick	321	3	[1]9·3
Berwick upon Tweed	284	0	[1]0
Blyth Valley	1,005	10	[1]10·0
Castle Morpeth	481	4	[1]8·3
Tyneside	655	6	[1]9·2
Wansbeck	751	10	[1]13·3

[1] Denotes a rate of less than 20 events.
[2] Number of deaths 0-6 days plus stillbirths per 1,000 total births. The arithmetic average of these rates is 8·7.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has collected on the factors which account for the disparity in statistics covering the rate per thousand perinatal deaths for Allerdale district and other districts in the Northern region.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the regional health authority in the first instance. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Northern regional health authority, Mr. Peter Carr. Clinicians in the northern region have operated a very successful perinatal mortality survey on a voluntary basis for the last 10 years, and an annual report of their findings is published each year by the authority. In addition, the RHA is to undertake a more detailed analysis to look for any local clustering of deaths using data now available for the period 1981-90.

In the meantime the hon. Member will be pleased to note that although the perinatal figures for Allerdale were disappointing in 1989, they were based on a relatively small sample and the figures for West Cumbria as a whole for the three years 1987-89 show a perinatal mortality rate of 7·7 per thousand population compared with a national average of 8·7 per thousand and a Northern regional average of 8·9 per thousand.

AIDS

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds the Government will be making available in the coming financial year for research into AIDS.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Subject to parliamentary approval the following sums will be available for AIDS research in 1991-92:

	£
Medical Research Council	12,800,000
Other research councils (Economic and Social Research Council; Agricultural and Fisheries Research Council; Scientific and Engineering Research Council; Natural Environment Research Council)	2,549,000
Department of Health	632,000
Health Education Council	804,000
National Institute of Biologics Standards and Control	517,000
Public Health Laboratory Service	404,000
Scottish Office of Home and Health	88,000
Overseas Development Administration (estimated expenditure)	528,000

Cot Deaths

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the incidence of sudden infant death syndrome in each year since 1982.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is shown in the table.

Number of infant deaths with any mention of sudden infant death[1] on the death certificate, and rate per 1,000 livebirths England and Wales 1982-89

	Number			Rate per 1,000 livebirths		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
1982	822	510	1,332	2·6	1·7	2·1
1983	827	488	1,315	2·6	1·6	2·1
1984	716	526	1,242	2·2	1·7	2·0
1985	787	514	1,301	2·3	1·6	2·0
1986	945	559	1,504	2·8	1·7	2·3
1987	918	610	1,528	2·6	1·8	2·2
1988	991	602	1,593	2·8	1·8	2·3
1989	811	515	1,326	2·3	1·5	1·9

[1] Includes "cot death" or similar term

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects *(a)* to receive and *(b)* to publish the report of the group of independent experts asked in March 1990 to investigate the claim that the emission of toxic gases from fungal growth on cot mattresses can be a cause of cot death; what form the inquiry took; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The report of the working group of independent experts set up by the chief medical officer has been given to him and will be published shortly. The form of inquiry is explained in the report.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if any blood tests done on babies which suffered sudden infant death syndrome show an elevated level of arsenic, antimony or phosphorous.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no reports of elevated blood levels of any of these chemicals from

pathologists who have carried out post-mortem examinations on infants who suffered from sudden infant death syndrome—SIDS. Such tests would be done only if specifically indicated.

We are aware that an independent researcher has reported that blood tests in three infants who suffered SIDS had antimony levels above the background levels measured by his laboratory in 100 healthy infants. As the normal range of blood antimony levels in infants is uncertain, it is not possible to say whether these findings are clinically significant.

This matter is considered in the report of the expert working group which will be published shortly.

Prescriptions (Fraud)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the steps his Department takes to prevent fraud when patients do not take all items on a multi-itemed general practitioner-written prescription;

(2) what information he has on the incidence of prescription-based fraud in the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Checking procedures undertaken by the Department to prevent prescription fraud are not made public. Cases of suspected prescription-based fraud are referred by the Prescription Pricing Authority to the Family Health Services Authority for investigation. No centrally held information is available on the number of established cases of fraud.

Achondroplasia

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued to district health authorities concerning charging for fixators for achondroplasiac children from outside their area.

Mr. Dorrell: No specific guidelines have been issued on this matter. From 1 April, health authorities wishing to purchase limb lengthening for achondroplasiac children will be able to arrange contracts for this operation with hospitals or other units providing this service. General guidance on the purchase of services from 1 April to meet the health needs of local populations has been issued to health authorities.

Senior Citizens

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition of senior citizen the Government use in respect of guidance issued to local authorities and other bodies.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The Government do not issue guidance of this kind. Local authorities are best placed to decide such a definition for themselves, according to local circumstances and the purpose for which it is required.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations are being made to the Sudanese Government to facilitate the transport of further food aid to rebel-held areas; and what account has been taken of problems arising at the advent of the rainy season in southern Sudan.

Mrs. Chalker: We take every opportunity to urge the Government of Sudan to facilitate the provision of relief supplies to the south of the country. The European Community issued a declaration on 7 February. The United Nations Assistant Secretary General, Mr. James Jonah, made representations on 18 February.

The United Nations co-ordinated Operation Lifeline Sudan takes into account the difficulties of transporting relief supplies in southern Sudan where it is recognised that conditions deteriorate in the rainy season.

Malaysia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been offered under the aid and trade provision for the Pergau project in Malaysia; and whether any appraisal measures additional to the regular appraisal procedure were carried out for this project.

Mrs. Chalker: We have offered to support from the aid and trade provision a soft loan of up to £308 million for eligible United Kingdom and other EC goods and services for this project. This compares with our original aid and trade provision offer in 1989 of a grant of up to £68·25 million as part of a mixed credit for eligible United Kingdom and other EC goods and services costing an estimated £195 million. The soft loan, like the originally proposed mixed credit, will have a grant element of 35 per cent. of the value of eligible goods and services provided. In accordance with our normal procedures a full appraisal of the project was undertaken.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minors (Financial Institutions)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to make unlawful the soliciting of minors for business by financial institutions and companies.

Mr. Leigh: The Government intend, as soon as legislative time is available, to amend the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to tighten up the prohibition on the sending of credit circulars to minors. It also proposes to make regulations requiring persons licensed under the Act to take reasonable precautions to ensure that minors are not included on mailing lists for credit circulars.

Retention of Title

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the adequacy of the law on retention of title in the light of successor companies inheriting goods from an insolvent company which the latter has not paid for; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a few representations about the adequacy of the law on retention of title, but only one referring to the circumstances described in the question. In general, the Government are satisfied that the law on retention of title clauses is effective.

Chambers of Commerce

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support his Department plans to provide to assist the development strategy of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce.

Mr. Leigh: I announced on 4 October 1990 that I would offer chambers of commerce support towards the implementation of their strategy, as set out in "Effective Business Support: a UK Strategy", to strengthen the ability of the chambers' movement to provide a consistent, quality assured and comprehensive service for members throughout the United Kingdom by the end of 1994. This support, at a cost of £1·2 million over four years, will involve meeting up to 50 per cent. of the salary costs of an extra member of staff in some 30 chambers for a maximum of two years. Additionally I have offered the Association of British Chambers of Commerce up to £130,000 to help with the costs of establishing an electronic information network.

Parliamentary approval for this service will be sought in the 1991-92 main estimates for the Department of Trade and Industry—class IV, vote 2. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £31,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Task Force Expenditure

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the expenditure of each task force set up by his Department for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Leigh: On the basis that this question relates to inner city task forces, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 23 January 1991 at columns *195-96*. I have nothing to add.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

17. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide his best available estimate of the number of casualties suffered by *(a)* Iraqi civilians, *(b)* Iraqi forces, *(c)* Kuwaiti civilians and *(d)* coalition forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Her Majesty's Government are not in a position to provide an overall estimate of the number of people killed during the Gulf conflict. A total of 25 British service men were killed in action.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the approximate distance and direction travelled by the 1st Armoured Division after 23 February.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: From its assembly area south of the Iraq-Saudi Arabian border, the ground campaign to liberate Kuwait took 1st (British) Armoured Division northwards on a course roughly parallel to but west of the Wadi al Batin, then east to a position just north of Kuwait city. In all, the division covered a distance of some 350 km.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operations of the 1st Armoured Division undertaken to re-take Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The 1st (British) Armoured Division played a significant role in the allied operation to liberate Kuwait. The division proper went into battle late in the afternoon of Monday 25 February when it engaged elements of an Iraqi armoured division. The speed and success of this operation was typical of land engagements in Desert Storm. By the early hours of 27 February, the Iraqi troops had been rendered ineffective and around 200 tanks, 100 armoured personnel carriers and 100 guns had been captured or destroyed and some 6,000 prisoners of war had been taken. The skill, courage and speed with which the division achieved its objectives are an achievement of which all involved can feel justly proud.

"Options for Change"

18. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the future of the departmental review known as "Options for Change", following the Gulf war.

28. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to revise "Options for Change" in the light of the Gulf war and the suppression of the Baltic states.

29. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review defence strategy in the light of the experience from the Gulf war.

Mr. Tom King: I hope it will be possible to publish the annual defence White Paper before the summer recess and in this to make clear the way ahead on 'Options for Change'.

Main Battle Tank

19. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce a decision on the competition for the replacement of the Chieftain tank.

Mr. Alan Clark: I hope that a decision on the equipment for our future main battle tank will not have to be delayed too long.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to award the contract for new battle tanks to Vickers Defence Systems and Challenger 2.

Mr. Alan Clark: No decision on the equipment for our future main battle tank fleet has yet been taken.

Arms Sales

20. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of his Department in the sale of arms abroad; and what information he has about where arms have been sold in the last three years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Defence Export Services Organisation exists within my Department to assist United Kingdom defence industries to promote and sell their equipment abroad. Statistics of British defence exports by broad geographic region are set out in volume 2 of the annual Statement on the Defence Estimates.

Trident

21. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current cost of the Trident nuclear weapons programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 12 February at column *383*.

Ministry Houses

22. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many houses owned by the Ministry of Defence are standing empty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 December 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, 10,760 MOD-owned houses and flats were vacant. Many of these properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly and others were being considered for disposal. In addition, 1,701 dwellings were in the process of being sold.

UN Peacekeeping Force

23. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to make a British contribution to any United Nations peacekeeping force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The arrangements for the security of the Gulf states are primarily a matter for the states of the region themselves. Any proposal for a United Nations peacekeeping or observer role would need to be considered carefully by the Security Council in the light of the wishes of the nations concerned.

Nuclear Test Veterans

24. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on compensation to nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on Friday 22 February 1991 at column *319*.

Gulf Victory Parade

25. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the participation of the armed services in the proposed victory parade.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Arrangements to mark our involvement in the Gulf conflict remain under consideration. An announcement will be made shortly.

Tornado

26. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many export orders now exist for variants of the Tornado.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department continues to receive inquiries relating to the potential future sale of Tornado aircraft. My hon. Friend will, of course, be aware that it has been the consistent policy of successive Administrations not to comment on individual defence exports or prospects.

Defence Establishments

27. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to alter the regional balance of defence establishments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 11 February 1991 at column *324*.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to British participation in international negotiations on reductions in short-range nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As was noted in the London declaration, negotiations on the reductions of short-range nuclear forces will be bilateral between the United States and Soviet Union. In conjunction with other NATO allies concerned, the United Kingdom will play an active part in the preparations for the negotiations.

Ceremonial Troops

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to cut the budget for ceremonial troops and horses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All areas of the Army are being considered under "Options for Change", but we are not yet in a position to take final decisions.

RAF Married Quarters

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to be in a position to commence the disposal of the officers' married quarters at RAF Biggin Hill.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is our intention to commence sale soon after the RAF has vacated the site, currently planned for early 1993.

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether sufficient married quarters accommodation will be available in Greater London to meet the expected demand when the RAF service families return from their postings in Germany.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Very few, if any, personnel returning from Germany are likely to be posted to London and the position with regard to availability of accommodation therefore remains as I explained to my hon. Friend on 20 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *79*.

Radiation

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is investigating the merits of a compensation scheme for radiation-linked disease similar to the scheme operated by British Nuclear Fuels.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Reduction

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likelihood of ratification of the CFE and START treaties.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is difficult to assess the prospects for ratification of the CFE treaty while key issues concerning its implementation by the Soviet Union remain unresolved. These issues were set out in my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State's answer of 15 March to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). The CFE treaty will not enter into force until it has been ratified by all 22 signatories. We hope that a START treaty can be signed later this year. Ratification will be a matter for the two Governments concerned.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Soviet Union concerning the CFE and START treaties.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made a number of representations to the Soviet Union about proper implementation of the CFE treaty. These include representations by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during his visit to Moscow on 5 March, and at ministerial and senior official level, bilaterally and jointly with our allies. The START treaty is a bilateral one between the US and USSR and we understand discussions are continuing.

India

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received from Her Majesty's high commissioner in India about the political situation in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We receive regular reports from our high commissioner in New Delhi about the political situation in India.

Cartagena Convention

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will be represented at the forthcoming meeting of the Cartagena convention in Kingston, Jamaica.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes.

Germany

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the German Government; and what was discussed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon . Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Chancellor Kohl, Herr Genscher and other German Ministers in Bonn during the Anglo-German summit on 11 March. They had excellent discussions on a wide range of topics including the Gulf, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and issues affecting the European Community and the NATO alliance.

Kuwait

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with Kuwait's ambassador in London concerning the rebuilding programme in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have brought to the attention of the Kuwaiti ambassador the range of experience and capabilities available from British industry to assist in the reconstruction of Kuwait. Similar action has been taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary with senior members of the Kuwaiti Government.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Yugoslavia about civil unrest in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's ambassador at Belgrade reports regularly on all aspects of Yugoslav politics.

Soviet Union

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will detail plans for financial aid to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no plans to provide financial aid to the Soviet Union. With our EC partners we have agreed to provide £177 million in food assistance and £350 million as a credit for food purchases. We also aim to offer technical assistance from our know-how fund, to the sum of £20 million over two years.

European Common Defence Policy

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the intergovernmental conferences' discussions about a common defence policy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are a range of views among our partners on whether the Twelve should take on a defence role. In our view European defence, although it must become increasingly self-sufficient, will continue to depend on the alliance and the north American role. We do not believe that the common foreign and security policy of the Twelve should be expanded to include defence.

Indonesia and East Timor

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list and number the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council which relate to Indonesia and East Timor; if he will summarise their demands and indicate the action Britain took when the voting occurred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: United Nations Security Council resolution 384 of 22 December 1975 deplored the armed Indonesian intervention in East Timor. United Nations Security Council resolution 389 of 22 April 1976 confirmed the right of the East Timorese to self-determination and called on the Indonesians to withdraw. The United Kingdom supported both resolutions.

With most European Community partners, the United Kingdom abstained on resolutions in the fourth committee on East Timor between 1976 and 1982.

United Nations General Assembly resolution No. 37/30 of 1982 invited the United Nations Secretary General to encourage a bilateral settlement and initiate discussions with the parties concerned.

The United Kingdom has welcomed the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative, which began in 1982, to promote contacts between Indonesia and Portugal to achieve a just settlement.

Tibetan Refugees

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will detail the nature and extent of any assistance extended by Her Majesty's Government to Tibetan refugees since May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Tibetan refugees in the United Kingdom are treated in exactly the same way as any other refugees in this country. Our assistance to refugees overseas is channelled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In the financial year 1989-90 we contributed £19·1 million to the UNHCR.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Wildlife Investigation Scheme

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to adopt in Northern Ireland a scheme along the lines of the wildlife investigation scheme in England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Hanley: It is intended to have a wildlife incident investigation scheme introduced in Northern Ireland later this year. This will be similar to a scheme in operation in other parts of the United Kingdom.

New University of Ulster

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show the number of students on each campus of the new university of Ulster who are from *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Great Britain, *(c)* the Irish Republic, *(d)* other EC countries and *(e)* elsewhere, or as much of such information as is available.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows for the 1990-91 academic year:

	(a) Northern Ireland		*(b)* Great Britain		*(c)* Republic of Ireland		*(d)* Other EC		*(e)* Elsewhere		Total	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Belfast	534	16	67	—	71	—	11	6	—	—	689	16
Coleraine	1,896	428	327	4	526	30	119	1	49	—	2,917	463
Jordanstown	4,116	3,186	92	2	400	42	43	2	79	8	4,730	3,240
Magee	651	566	41	—	158	118	10	1	9	—	869	685
Total	7,197	4,196	327	6	1,155	190	178	4	148	8	9,205	4,404

Farm Effluent

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what educational facilities on environmentally safe methods for disposal of farm effluent are available to farmers.

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland uses a wide range of extension education methods. These include meetings, demonstrations, farm walks, radio and television broadcasts, press articles, booklets, leaflets, advisory letters, agricultural shows, training courses and individual advice.

ACE Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which action for community employment schemes are being supported in the Portavogie district of the Ards peninsula.

Mr. Needham: There are currently no ACE schemes based in the Portavogie district. However, I understand that an ACE scheme, Donaghadee community workforce, plans to establish an out-centre in Portavogie later this year.

Fish Processing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fish processing plants there are in Northern Ireland; and how many of these plants comply with the EC hygiene regulations due in 1992.

Mr. Hanley: There are some 30 main fish processing plants in Northern Ireland. Most are likely to need some improvements in order to comply fully with the proposed directive.

Marenco Ltd.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when Marenco Ltd. was incorporated as a limited company; when the company's annual returns were last lodged with the companies office; to what years did these returns refer; and what is the last record in the companies office of sale of shares in Marenco Ltd. by Queen's university, Belfast, and by QUBIS Ltd.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* The information about this company and its annual returns is held by the Registrar of Companies for Northern Ireland at 64 Chichester street, Belfast and is available to the public during office hours. Records of sales of shares in a company are held on the company's registrar of shareholdings which can be inspected at the company's registered office.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Salmonella Enteriditis

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what factors he attributes the increase in cases of salmonella enteriditis and PT4 over the past 12 months; what steps he plans to take to reverse this trend; and if he will make a statement.

Mr, Maclean: Reported isolations of salmonella enteriditis in poultry flocks increased by about 1 per cent. in 1990 compared with 1989. The increase is likely to reflect the level of bacteriological monitoring which increased in 1989 when compulsory testing was introduced. For broiler breeder flocks in particular, the introduction of compulsory monitoring through the hatchery in October 1989 led to a substantial increase in the number of reported isolations of salmonella enteriditis. For laying flocks producing eggs for human consumption, there was a reduction of 38 per cent. in reports of salmonella entertidis between 1989 and 1990.

The Government's policy on control of salmonella was explained in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 14 January.

Veterinary Investigation Centre

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has entered into with farmers' unions and professional organisations prior to his decision to close the veterinary investigation centre in Bangor, north Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The review of the veterinary investigation service which my right hon. Friend the Minister commissioned was an internal review. Initial discussions were held with the trade unions and during the period of the review views were submitted from a number of interested parties, including the British Veterinary Association and the National Farmers Unions. These views were carefully considered before any final decisions were taken.

We believe that the implementation of these recommendations of the review team will result in significant improvements in the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the veterinary investigation service. This is important if we are to have a VI service which is well equipped to meet our national needs over the years ahead.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what records he keeps concerning the location of sites used for the burial or other disposal of farm animals which die or are destroyed as a result of the outbreak of notifiable disease; and whether any constraints are placed on the subsequent use of such sites.

Mr. Maclean: My Department records the location of premises where outbreaks of certain notifiable diseases, such as foot and mouth disease, which require the compulsory slaughter of animals, occur. It also keeps information on anthrax outbreaks, including the method of disposal of carcases and burial sites.

It is illegal to dig up any buried carcase, except under licence from this Department, but if a burial pit is uncovered accidentally, the local divisional veterinary officer will make arrangements for the safe removal and disposal of the remains.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is possible for BST-free milk to be identified at point of sale.

Mr. Maclean: No. All cows milk contains BST in minute but variable quantities.

Fishing Nets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the mortalities caused to sea birds by synthetic gill nets.

Mr. Curry: Our local sea fisheries inspectorate staff report on significant bird mortalities arising from fishing operations. I have received no such reports of incidents since the winter of 1988, when some 500 birds were reported killed, until February this year when some dead birds were found on a Cornwall beach in plastic bags and their deaths were claimed to be caused by monofilament gill nets but have not been substantiated as such. There is little evidence to suggest that these nets are threatening the survival of any species.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 14 December 1990, *Official Report*, column 540, whether he now intends to support the proposed EC regulation 3094/86 to ban driftnets over 2·5 km in length; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The proposed addition to regulation 3094/86 to ban the use of drift nets over 2·5 km in length and four other separate measures contained in the proposed 11th amendment package are being examined in the working group for their scientific and legal basis, practical effect, operational feasibility and enforceability. Recommendations to the Council of Ministers from the working group on the proposal have not yet been made.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria are used to determine whether synthetic gill nets may be used in areas of high marine wildlife value.

Mr. Curry: No. Regulations governing the use of these nets are imposed as byelaws by either the sea fisheries committees or the National Rivers Authority (NRA) within the 3-mile coastal zone. My own scientists and sea fisheries inspectorate are also active in monitoring the use of these nets and incidental catches. On the evidence available to us these nets are not endangering any species and can serve fish conservation because of their high degree of selectivity.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has consulted the Nature Conservancy Council over the use of synthetic gill nets and their effect on marine wildlife.

Mr. Curry: For fisheries conservation and management purposes these nets are already subject in many inshore areas to local restrictions imposed as byelaws by either sea

fisheries committees or the National Rivers Authority. Our current scientific advice is that gill nets, when set properly, can be beneficial in fish conservation terms through their high selectivity.

Hunts

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations have been made to him by hunts in the New Forest regarding the recording of their activities by video camera.

Mr. Curry: No such representations have been received.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any advice has been given to Forestry Commission keepers in the New Forest regarding the use of video cameras to record the activities of local hunts.

Mr. Curry: The Forestry Commission's keepers in the New Forest have been advised that the use of video cameras by members of the public lawfully on commission land is permitted under the commission's byelaws, provided that such use does not cause annoyance to any other person.

Meat Inspection Charges

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress on the implementation of harmonised meat inspection charges in other European Community member states.

Mr. Maclean: No. This question is properly the concern of the other European Community member states and of the European Commission.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he intends to give to local authorities about implementation of the new meat inspection charges.

Mr. Maclean: Guidance on the implementation of the new meat inspection charges has already been given to local authorities in the form of a circular, FSH 3/90, issued in December. I am arranging for a copy of this circular to be placed in the Library of the House.

We will also be issuing shortly to local authority associations and the main trade associations a brief guide to the appeals procedure provided for in the regulations.

Pesticide Residues

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of samples of food analysed since 1988 by his pesticide residue monitoring programme which have exceeded the levels set in the Pesticide (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988, giving the name of the pesticide in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The full results of monitoring for pesticide residues in food were published in September 1990 in the "Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues 1988-89." A copy of the report is available in the Library of the House.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the numbers of prosecutions made in each year since 1988 which have been taken as a result of the maximum pesticide residue levels in food having been exceeded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No prosecutions have been taken under the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988, but one consignment of Chinese rabbit has been refused entry into the United Kingdom because it was found to contain residues in excess of United Kingdom limits.

Where residues above United Kingdom or international maximum residue levels have been found in monitoring, action has been taken as described in the "Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues 1988-89." A copy of the report is available in the Library of the House.

Fisheries Conservation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the EC technical conservation measures he intends to support at the forthcoming EC Fisheries Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The agenda has not yet been settled. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary intends to press for action in particular to improve the selectivity of nets to reduce discards of fish and improve the conservation of key fish stocks of interest to our fishermen.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects to make an interim assessment of the 1991 fishing catch restrictions; amd what comparison he will make of such an assessment with other EC countries;

(2) if he will make a statement on the work his Department is doing now in preparation for the 1992 plans to reduce fishing effort in advance of information on the effectiveness of the 1991 measures and in advance of the views of the European Commissioner.

Mr. Curry: The effects of the 1991 restrictions will be assessed by the advisory committee on fisheries management, which includes representatives of other member states, when it meets in November. Decisions on 1992 will not be taken until the Council of Ministers meets at the end of the year.

Beam Trawling

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effects of beam trawling on the ocean environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: It is apparent from the research to date that beam trawling can cause significant transient disturbance of the seabed. However, it is not clear whether long-term damage results and further work is being done in this area in which United Kingdom scientists will participate. The many benthic species respond differently to disturbance of the seabed and while some may suffer other thrive. When the further work has been done, the impact on benthic species and maintenance of sustainable use of our renewable marine resources will be considered.

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will show, for each constituency in Glasgow or other convenient sub-city defined area, the amount of central Government housing repairs grants in the private sector for each year from 1980 to 1990 or the latest convenient date; and if he will express each constituency's or sub-area's expenditure as a percentage of the whole city total.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures showing the capital allocation allowed to Glasgow district council for its public sector housing stock in each year from 1978 to 1989, using 1978 as the base for expressing all subsequent years in real terms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Gross housing capital allocations issued to Glasgow district council for investment in its own stock for each year from 1978-79 to 1988-89 are set out in the table. The figures incorporate any supplementary allocations made during the year and are expressed in 1978-79 prices.

City of Glasgow District Council
Gross HRA Capital Allocations (1978-79 prices)

Year	(£m)
1978-79	54·6
1979-80	52·7
1980-81	45·3
1981-82	40·1
1982-83	35·8
1983-84	38·3
1984-85	26·2
1985-86	30·9
1986-87	34·5
1987-88	41·3
1988-89	40·6

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the housing stock held by Glasgow district council in each year from 1978 to 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information supplied by Glasgow district council for each year from 1979 onwards at 31 March is set out in the table. A comparable figure for 1978 is not available.

Glasgow district council local authority stock

Year	Stock
1979	180,209
1980	180,974
1981	177,141
1982	176,500
1983	173,673
1984	171,640
1985	170,548
1986	171,554
1987	169,548
1988	166,429
1989	161,019

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of sheltered house completions by district councils, housing associations and purely private sector development, in the period 1978 to 1989, and if he will show the figures by district council area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on housebuilding by user category is not available for the years prior to 1986 and could be extracted only at disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member to advise him of the information available for subsequent years.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount of Government grant in real terms, taking 1978 as the base year, provided to Glasgow district council for private sector housing repairs and maintenance grants for each year from 1978 to 1990; and if he will also express Glasgow's share as a percentage of the Scottish allocation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Gross housing capital allocations to Glasgow district council for investment in private sector housing for each year from 1978-79 to 1989-90, expressed in 1978-79 prices and also as a percentage of the total Scottish allocation, are set out in the table. The figures for 1987-88 to 1989-90 include additional resources made available to deal with the backlog of pre-1984 improvement and repairs grants. Apart from these additional resources, the council is free to use the capital allocations for any investment in private sector housing according to local priorities.

City of Glasgow district council
Non-HRA gross capital allocations
(1978-79 prices)

Year	£ million	Percentage share
1978-79	12·4	24·7
1979-80	11·5	27·5
1980-81	12·4	26·6
1981-82	12·8	24·5
1982-83	17·0	26·8
1983-84	[1]17·1	30·5
1084-85	45·2	50·0
1985-86	21·0	34·4
1986-87	21·1	34·2
1987-88	26·5	35·5
1988-89	23·2	32·1
1989-90	23·4	33·8

[1] Special arrangements applied in 1983-84 when authorities were allowed to exceed the allocation subject to certain conditions.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish for each district council area in Scotland the number of private and public sector house completions respectively in the period 1974 to 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Tables giving details on house completions from 1978 to 1989 have been placed in the House Library.

Comparable information for the years 1974-77 is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority dwellings *(a)* were vacant and available for letting on 1 April 1989 and *(b)* became available for letting between 1 April 1989 and 31 March 1990, by way of (i) new build, (ii) acquisition, modernisation or conversion and (iii) other means in (1) Inverclyde district council area, (2) Strathclyde and (3) Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[Holding Answer 18 March 1991]:* Information on vacant local authority dwellings is collected at 31 March each year. The numbers of such dwellings available for letting at 31 March 1989 were published in table 10 of Statistical Bulletin HSU No. 13. Table 15 of Statistical Bulletin HSU No. 17 gives comparable figures for 1990. Copies of these bulletins are available in the House Library.

No reliable information is held centrally on the number of houses which became available for letting over the period in question.

Fire Advisory Panel

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members serve on the fire advisory panel for Scotland; and how many of those members are also members of the Society of Fire Safety Engineers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no separate fire advisory panel for Scotland, but the Scottish Office is represented by an official on the Department of the Environment's panel.

Health Board Chairmen

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the six chairmen of health boards who are continuing in office until 1992 or 1993 and give for each their profession.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The health board chairmen whose current term of office runs until 1992 or 1993 and their professions are:

Chairman	*Health Board*	*Profession*
Mr. W. S. Fyfe OBE	Ayrshire and Arran	Company Chairman and Management Consultant
Dr. D. H. Pringle CBE	Borders	Applied Scientist and Businessman (retired)
Mr. J. A. McIntyre OBE JP	Dumfries and Galloway	Farmer
Mrs. J. I. D. Isbister	Forth Valley	Mental Welfare Commissioner
Mr. J. Kyle CBE	Grampian	Consultant Surgeon (retired)
Mrs. F. B. Grains	Shetland	Housewife

Channel Tunnel Rail Services

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with British Rail about the location of a freight terminal offering trunk rail services to the channel tunnel.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regular contact is maintained with British Rail by both Scottish Office Ministers and officials. Such contacts cover a wide range of topics concerning rail services in Scotland, including the possible location of a Scottish terminal for channel tunnel freight traffic.

Geriatric Psychiatric Services

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision exists for geriatric psychiatric services in the south side of Glasgow; and what are the present waiting lists.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are 466 long-term care beds at Leverdale hospital and 90 long-term care beds at the Southern general hospital for geriatric psychiatry patients. On 13 march the waiting list for long-term psychogeriatric care was 11.

There are two psychogeriatric day hospitals providing a total of 40 places. The waiting list for day beds was 14 on 13 March.

In addition, there are outpatient clinics and the area is served by four community psychiatric nurses for the elderly.

Inverclyde Initiative

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *219*, how the figure of the number of jobs created as a result of the period of operation of the Inverclyde initiative was calculated; and if he will list these jobs, by occupational classification.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The figure is based on information provided to the Inverclyde Initiative by the companies it assisted and its own records of placements under the training and employment grants scheme. The figures were checked to exclude any element of double counting.

The occupational classification of these jobs is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow of 6 March, *Offical Report*, column *219*, if he will indicate how the figure of jobs created, the figure of existing jobs secured and the figure of new jobs forecast by companies as a result of the establishment of the Inverclyde enterprise zone were arrived at; and if he will list these jobs by occupational classification.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The figures are based on information provided to the Inverclyde Initiative by the companies it assisted to locate in the zone and its own records of placements under the training and employment grants scheme. The figures were checked to exclude any element of double counting.

The occupational classification of these jobs is not available.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of short listed companies which retain an active interest in the Skye bridge project; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Environment Department's roads directorate, in consultation with Highland regional council, is in the final stages of negotiation of a preliminary concession agreement for the Skye bridge. An announcement will be made shortly.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to enforce the requirement in fishing vessel licences that fishing vessels fishing between ICES IV (North Sea) and VI (West of Scotland) have to call in.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on vessel movements is collected from a variety of sources including air and sea surveillance and is compared with records of vessels which have reported in. Where sufficient evidence exists to show that a vessel has crossed the 4 deg. west line without reporting in, the case is referred to the prosecuting authorities.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he still requires fishing vessels crossing the 4 deg. line to call in; and when enforcement policy for this requirement was last changed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The requirement for fishing vessels holding North sea and west of Scotland white fish or herring licences to report by radio when crossing the 4 deg. west line was introduced in March 1989 and remains in force. The reporting-in requirement continues to be vigorously enforced.

Historic Buildings Council for Scotland

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the functioning of the Historical Buildings Council for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Historic Buildings Council for Scotland has the statutory responsibility for advising my right hon. Friend on the discharge of certain of his powers in relation to listed buildings, most notably the making of historic building repair grants. The council's terms of reference, membership and activities over the years since 1953 when it was set up are set out in its annual reports, which are laid before both Houses of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend is grateful for the sound advice which the council provides.

Ambulances

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of emergency and urgent patients in the Largs area have been required to travel in single-manned ambulances in each of the past three years; and if he has any proposals to reduce this figure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Figures have not been collected routinely by the Scottish ambulance service on the number of emergency and urgent journeys undertaken by single-manned ambulances. However, the practice of single-manning is undesirable and over the years I have increased the resources for the Scottish ambulance service. For the coming year I have given an additional £2 million to be specifically targeted at a reduction in the number of single-manned ambulances.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many paramedical staff were employed by the Argyll and Clyde health board in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990;

(2) how many consultants were employed in hospitals within the Argyll and Clyde health board in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990;

(3) how many nursing staff were employed in the Argyll and Clyde health board in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990;

(4) how many ancillary staff were employed by the Argyll and Clyde health board in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* The number of whole-time equivalent staff for each year ending 30 September is set out in the following table.

	Year	WTE
Paramedical Staff	1979	210·8
	1986	260·1
	1990	307·4
Hospital Consultants	1979	90·0
	1986	106·8
	1990	129·9
Nursing Staff	1979	4,371·5
	1986	4,695·6
	1990	4,775·8
Ancillary Staff	1979	2,115·9
	1986	1,739·1
	1990	1,349·6

Forestry Commission

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his plans for privatisation of the organisation of the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* The plans for the internal reorganisation of the Forestry Commission announced by my right hon. Friend on 6 March, columns *220-21*, do not involve privatisation.

Tree Planting

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of land was planted with trees in 1990 under grant-aided schemes; what proportion represented the restocking of felled woodland; and what proportion represented planting of land not formerly under trees.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* In the year ended 31 December 1990, the Forestry Commission grant-aided some 22,700 hectares of tree planting, including planting carried out under the farm woodland scheme. Of this total, 31 per cent. comprised restocking and 69 per cent. new planting.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of land was planted by the Forestry Commission in 1990; what proportion represented the restocking of felled woodland; and what proportion represented planting of land not formerly under trees.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* In the year ended 31 December 1990, the Forestry Commission carried out some 11,100 hectares of planting, 65 per cent. of which was restocking and 35 per cent. new planting.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of land was planted in 1990 under the

woodland grant scheme; what proportion represented the restocking of felled woodland; and what proportion represented a carry forward into the woodland grant scheme from a former dedication scheme or forestry grant scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* In the year ended 31 December 1990, the Forestry Commission grant-aided 15,900 hectares of planting under the woodland grant scheme, of which 34 per cent. was for the restocking of felled woodland. Some 3,000 hectares of new planting were also grant-aided under that scheme in association with the farm woodland scheme.

The commission's records do not show what proportions of these areas of planting were previously included in a dedication scheme or in the forestry grant scheme.

Student Loans

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of students attending all designated courses for all student loans who are potentially eligible for student loans in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* It is estimated that some 70,000 students domiciled in Scotland are eligible for a loan in the academic year 1990-91. The estimate may be revised as further data become available.

Loan-bearing courses do not require designation if they are at institutions receiving support from public funds. The Secretary of State may designate as loan-bearing courses of higher education at other institutions under regulation 4 of the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1990.

State Hospital, Carstairs

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mentally ill patients at the state hospital at Carstairs, who have not committed offences, come from each health board region in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Information on patients who have not been convicted of any criminal offence is as follows:

	Number
Argyll and Clyde	7
Ayr and Arran	—
Borders	1
Dumfries and Galloway	—
Fife	2
Forth Valley	2
Grampian	2
Greater Glasgow	9
Highland	3
Lanarkshire	—
Lothian	12
Orkney	—
Shetland	—
Tayside	4
Western Isles	—
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Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 March 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library a transcript of the Birmingham pub bombings appeal hearing.

The Attorney-General: Arrangements are being made to have copies of the transcript placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Retail Prices

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the prices of one pint of milk, 1lb of beef sirloin, one loaf of bread, 20 cigarettes, the average price of a three-bedroomed house and a medium-sized car, in 1970, 1980, 1985 and 1990 taking current prices as 100; and if he will show the percentage changes in each case.

Mr. Maples: Following is the available information.

	Index (January 1991 = 100)	*Percentage change in prices to January 1991*
Fresh milk		
January 1970	13·1	660·5
January 1980	46·5	115·0
January 1985	68·2	46·6
January 1990	92·5	8·1
January 1991	100·0	—
Beef, sirloin		
January 1970	10·6	842·2
January 1980	54·3	84·2
January 1985	75·5	32·5
January 1990	98·9	1·1
January 1991	100·0	—
Large white sliced loaf		
January 1970	15·1	561·1
January 1980	56·0	78·4
January 1985	69·6	43·6
January 1990	91·9	8·8
January 1991	100·0	—
Cigarettes		
January 1970	13·3	653·6
January 1980	37·5	166·8
January 1985	70·8	41·3
January 1990	91·6	9·2
January 1991	100·0	—
House prices[1]		
January 1970	7·2	1,288·9
January 1980	34·8	187·4
January 1985	48·8	104·9
January 1990	104·8	−4·6
January 1991	100·0	—
Medium sized car[2]		

[1] Based on national average price for all house types. Specific figures for a three-bedroomed house are not available.
[2] Information on new car prices is not available.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish estimates for the length of time a married man with two children on average male earnings had to work in 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and for the latest date available, after taking into account income tax liability and national insurance contribution, to pay for each of one pint of fresh milk, one pint of beer, 20 cigarettes, the weekly rent of a three-bedroomed council house and the running costs of a medium-sized car.

Mr. Maples: The lengths of time necessary to work to pay for one pint of milk, one pint of beer, and 20 cigarettes are shown in the table. Data for 1960 and data for the weekly rent of a three-bedroomed council house and the running costs of a medium-sized car are not available.

The lengths of time necessary to work to pay for selected commodities and services are published annually in "Social Trends". Copies are available in the Library.

Length of time necessary to work to pay for selected commodities
Great Britain *Minutes*

	Married couple with husband only working[1]		
	1970[2] *Minutes*	*1980*[2] *Minutes*	*1990*[2] *Minutes*
Pint of fresh milk	5	4	3
Pint of beer (draught bitter)	16	13	11
20 cigarettes (filter tipped)	29	18	17

[1] Length of time necessary for a married man on average hourly male adult earnings for all industries and services, with a non-earning wife and two children under 11, to work so that his net income pays for the various goods.
[2] At April.

EEC

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each year since 1973 what were *(a)* the overall payments by the Treasury to the European Economic Community, *(b)* the overall payment made by the European Economic Community to Britain in refunds and all other payments, *(c)* the total payments and refunds made to the Treasury and *(d)* the net cost to the Treasury.

Mr. Maude: The information requested concerning public sector contributions and receipts to and from the Community budget for 1973-1989 is set out in the following table. The Commission does not provide member states with details of payments made directly to the private sector. The overall payment made by the EC to the UK is therefore not available.

£ million

Year	Gross payments to the EC	Public sector receipts other than refunds and abatements	Negotiated refunds	VAT abatements	Net contribution after refunds and abatements[1]
1973	181	79	—	—	102
1974	179	150	—	—	29
1975	342	398	—	—	−56
1976	463	296	—	—	167
1977	737	368	—	—	369
1978	1,348	526	—	—	822
1979	1,606	659	—	—	947
1980	1,767	963	98	—	706
1981	2,174	1,084	693	—	397
1982	2,863	1,238	1,019	—	606
1983	2,976	1,522	807	—	647
1984	3,204	2,020	528	—	656
1985	3,940	1,905	61	166	1,808
1986	4,493	2,220	—	1,701	572
1987	5,202	2,328	—	1,153	1,721
1988	5,138	2,182	—	1,594	1,362
1989	5,585	2,116	—	1,154	2,315

[1] Because of rounding the total with not necessarily equal the sum of the individual items.
The information for 1990 is due to be published in April in the Statement on the 1991 Community Budget.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Polytechnics

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to make further polytechnic designations between now and 30 June 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We have made clear that we see the designation of new polytechnics as a continuing process, and would be happy to receive advice from the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council at any time that an institution has met the criteria for designation as a polytechnic together with the supporting evidence.

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what plans he has to create a joint funding council for universities and polytechnics; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to dissolve the binary line between universities and polytechnics; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 25 February 1991, (*Official Report*, columns *332-33*)

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many persons were employed in the Education department of Kirklees metropolitan council in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: The figures in the table are taken from a table of joint staffing watch data, analysed by local education authority, which has previously been placed in the library.

The total employees of Kirklees metropolitan council education department in March 1990 were as follows:

	Number
Full-time teachers and lecturers	4,040
Part-time teachers and lecturers	1,520
Full-time other employees	1,350
Part-time other employees	4,750

These figures include the nursery, primary and secondary schools sector, special and further education and central administration.

Comparable figures for other years are not available.

Education and Training Costs

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much in total, at constant prices, has been spent on the education and training of the average United Kingdom citizen by the time he or she reaches *(a)* 16 years, *(b)* 18 years, *(c)* 20 years, *(d)* 22 years and *(e)* 24 years; and if he will give equivalent figures for the main OECD countries.

Mr. Alan Howarth: On the basis of 1988-89 unit costs for maintained schools in England, expenditure per pupil up to age 16 amounts to some £16,000. Information for the other ages requested, and for OECD countries, is not available in this form.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), last paid an official visit to a school in Stockton, South; and which county councillors he met.

Mr. Fallon: I visited Grangefield school in Stockton-on-Tees on 25 February 1991 and met County Councillor D. C. McReddie, chairman of the education committee.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Crispin Rushworth-Lund

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to persuade the Dutch authorities to investigate the murder of Mr. Crispin Rushworth-Lund in St. Maarten.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 7 December 1990 the British consul-general in Amsterdam put to the Netherlands authorities the suggestion made by my hon. Friend that detectives from the Netherlands should investigate the murder in St. Maarten of Mr. Rushworth-Lund. He wrote again about the case on 18 December. We are still waiting for a reply. The consulate-general sent a reminder on 15 March.

Virgin Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has arranged during his visit to the British Virgin Islands; whom he will meet; and what is the purpose of his visit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I hope to visit the British Virgin Islands—BVI—from 20 to 22 April: I hope to meet the governor, the chief minister and executive council and leading members of the community. In particular I hope to look at BVI's capabilities to combat drug trafficking and see and discuss developments in the offshore finance sector.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Ministers from the British Virgin Islands about combating drugs trafficking; what action he is now taking as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: When I met the chief minister of the British Virgin Islands, the Hon. Lavity Stoutt, on 11 March we discussed the campaign to combat drugs trafficking through BVI. I informed the chief minister that the FCO had just purchased a drugs surveillance aircraft to be based in BVI and would fund a two man RAF team to operate it. I hope to be able to inspect anti-narcotics operations in the BVI during a visit from 20 to 22 April.

Plastic Explosives

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in international initiatives to make plastic explosives detectable.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A new convention on the marking of plastic explosives for detection was opened for signature at the International Civil Aviation Organisation on 1 March. The United Kingdom, with 40 other countries, signed the convention. Among other things, the convention will require all plastic explosives manufactured by states parties to be "marked" through a chemical additive; prohibit the import and export of unmarked plastic explosives; and, subject to certain exceptions, require the destruction of commercial stocks of unmarked plastic explosives within three years, and certain military stocks within 15 years, after entry into force. The convention is the result of an Anglo-Czechoslovak initiative, launched after the Lockerbie bombing. We warmly welcome the rapid completion of the convention, in which British officials played a leading part. We hope to ratify the convention at an early date.

PRIME MINISTER

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact of the operation of the uniform business rate on *(a)* offices, *(b)* factories, *(c)* warehouses and *(d)* shops in Wales relative to England.

The Prime Minister: The uniform business rate poundage for 1990-91 has been set at 36·8p in the pound in Wales in order to raise broadly the same amount in real terms from private business and nationalised industries as in 1989-90. The same principle has been adopted in England.

The combined impact of the revaluation of non-domestic property and the introduction of the uniform business rate on the specified categories of property is shown in the tables:

Changes in aggregate rate bills[1] between 1989-90 and 1990-91

Property type	Percentage change Wales	England
Offices	0	12
Factories	−26	−31
Warehouses	−17	−22
Shops	21	18

[1] After allowing for inflation as measured by the retail prices index and for appeals against valuation.

Changes in rate bills by property type, England and Wales

Property type	Reduction (−)/Increase (+) in rate bill, per cent. England Overall change	England Net change on UBR	England Net change on revaluation	Wales Overall change	Wales Net change on UBR	Wales Net change on revaluation
Factories	−31	−9	−22	−26	−1	−26
Warehouses	−22	−6	−15	−17	+1	−17
Shops	+18	−1	+19	+21	—	+21
Offices	+12	+20	−8	—	+7	−8
Other properties	+12	−5	+16	+12	—	+12

TRANSPORT

Oil Spill Recovery Equipment

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much dispersant the marine pollution control unit keeps in stock expressed in *(a)* value in £ sterling, *(b)* weight and *(c)* volume; what were the stocks in each of the last five years; and what was the capital expenditure of the unit for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine pollution control unit —MPCU—current dispersant stock expressed in *(a)* value *(b)* weight and *(c)* volume is as follows:

(a)	value	£1.68 million
(b)	weight	1,680 tonnes
(c)	volume	1,680 cubic metres

Further stocks are in the course of supply to maintain the level of about 1,800 tonnes which has been held for the last five years.

Total capital expenditure by the MPCU, including the purchase of dispersant, for each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*£,000*
1986-87	282
1987-88	130
1988-89	215
1989-90	333
1990-91	397

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the contingency fund *(a)* held and *(b)* expended for oil spill recovery for the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department has Treasury approval to spend whatever it deems reasonable to deal with a major pollution threat and there are arrangements for calling on the contingencies reserve as necessary. This is represented by a token provision of £1,000 in the Department's annual estimates.

Expenditure on dealing with oil spills in each of the last five years is as follows:

	£ thousands
1986-87	0
1987-88	10
1988-89	62
1989-90	168
1990-91	715

The figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 include £29,000 and £200,000 respectively for the deployment of MPCU oil recovery equipment and hire and deployment of supplementary oil spill recovery resources. Reimbursement of all of this expenditure has been obtained, or is being sought, from the polluters.

Marine Pollution Control Unit

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total budget of the marine pollution control unit for the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total budget of the marine pollution control unit for each of the last five years, excluding the cost of dealing with major oil spills, was as follows:

Year	*£,000*
1986-87	3,076
1987-88	2,781
1988-89	2,805
1989-90	3,308
1990-91	5,974

Buses

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to the statement of Monday 11 March, *Official Report*, column 722, he will indicate any information available to him on the maximum percentage reduction in scheduled bus mileage on any bus route in east London.

Mr. Freeman: London Transport expects scheduled bus mileage in 1990-91 to rise to 182 million miles—an increase of 4 per cent over last year. I have no information on the performance of individual London bus routes. That is a matter for London Transport.

British Railways Board

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Railways Board members receive pay related to train punctuality; what percentage of the board's total remuneration such payments represent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Under the terms of the British Railways Board members' bonus scheme, the six full-time executive members are eligible for bonus payments based on, among other things, train punctuality. Board members can earn payments of up to 4 per cent. of annual salary if British Rail meets the agreed train punctuality targets, and up to 7 per cent if the targets are exceeded. In 1989-90 board members earned a bonus of 1·5 per cent. for exceeding the punctuality target for the provincial sector.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce his decision on the future of the auxiliary coastguard service, arising from the recent review.

Mr. McLoughlin: After there has been time to consider the advice of regional controllers and the Chief Coastguard, following consultation that is now in progress. It is expected that this process will be concluded during the summer.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the vehicle inspectorate business plan for 1991-92 will be published.

Mr. Chope: The business plan has been published today. Copies are available in the House Libraries.

Trains

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received an investment submission from British Rail to place an order for 200 new Networker electric trains for Kent link services; when he will be in a position to reply to the application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend received an investment submission for British Rail, requesting approval for 274 class 465 vehicles, in a letter dated 29 January. British Rail provided additional information on 26 February and 13 March. My right hon. and learned Friend will respond as soon as possible.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received an investment submission from British Rail to place an order for 60 vehicles to be used on London Paddington/Oxford services; when he will be in a position to reply to the application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend received an investment submission from British Rail, requesting approval for 59 class 165 vehicles, in a letter dated 29 January. British Rail provided additional information on 19 February. My right hon. and learned Friend will respond as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what advice he has given to private forestry companies to ensure against disturbance or destruction of active badger setts during forestry operations;

(2) what steps he has taken to protect active badger setts from disturbance or destruction by planting, timber harvesting or other operations on Forestry Commission land.

Mr. Curry: Badger setts are not on the whole vulnerable to damage from forestry operations, since they are characteristically large, subterranean and in well-drained soils. The Forestry Commission nevertheless endeavours to locate all the badger setts on its land so that they can be protected from any possible damage. It has also published forest nature conservation guidelines, for use by its own forest managers and those in the private sector, which emphasise the importance of good management in protecting animal populations.

Cereal Farmers

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average income of a cereal farmer in each of the last five years.

Mr. Curry: The information is not available in the form requested. About one third of the total area of cereals in England is on specialist cereal farms and over a half is on general cropping farms. The following table provides estimates of the net farm income from a sample of these types of farm in England as recorded by the farm business survey.

Average net farm income of specialist cereal and general cropping farms in England

£ per farm

	Specialist cereal farms	*General cropping farms*
1985-86	3,800	6,100
1986-87	9,700	17,700
1987-88	1,600	8,400
1988-89	2,100	8,500
1989-90	8,700	21,800

Note: The figures shown relate to samples of farms which change somewhat each year. The movement in incomes from year to year is more accurately measured by a comparison of the results from an identical sample for each year which are published annually in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom".

Infant Formulae

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the recent adoption of the European Commission directive on infant formulae and follow-on formulae.

Mr. Gummer: The Government voted in favour of the adoption of this important directive. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health, and I warmly welcome the essential compositional and nutritional standards which this directive will provide for the first time to safeguard the health and safety of bottle-fed babies. During the negotiations in Brussels the United Kingdom succeeded in obtaining important changes that align the directive more closely with the principles and aims of the World Health Organisation international code on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes. In particular, improvements have been obtained in relation to the advertising controls on infant formulae and to the provisions covering the supply of these products to hospitals.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Virgin Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies have been undertaken into the feasibility of extending the runway on the British Virgin Islands; what cost is involved; and what action he plans to take.

Mrs. Chalker: We have not undertaken or commissioned any studies into the feasibility of extending the airport runway on the British Virgin Islands; nor have we been asked or have any plans to do so. We understand that consultants from Israel have undertaken preliminary feasibility studies at the request of and funded by the British Virgin Islands Government and that estimated costs of around US$30 million—£15 million to £20 million—have been mentioned.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recommendations were made in the report he commissioned on education in the British Virgin Islands; what plans he has to implement them; and what funds will be made available for this.

Mrs. Chalker: The 1988 education sector review recommended improved access to primary and secondary education through the reorganisation of existing infrastructure and management, with the quality of primary and secondary schooling to be assured through strengthening monitoring systems and increased budget allocations for instructional materials and in-service training. The Overseas Development Administration has assisted with quality improvement through the provision of additional school buildings and equipment linked with staff development for primary and secondary training in-country, in the region and in the United Kingdom.

We have also assisted the British Virgin Islands Government in the formulation of its first five-year

development plan for education. Initial Government reaction to the plan has been favourable and we have indicated our willingness to continue to provide further technical assistance in its implementation when the Government have determined their priorities.

India (Property Projects)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs over what period £175 million for property projects in India, referred to in the letter of 15 February from the Minister of Overseas Development, was committed; and on what basis the decision was made not to include reference to the period involved in the letter.

Mrs. Chalker: My letter gave the total value of the British bilateral contribution to poverty alleviation projects in India against which our aid funds are currently being disbursed. Of that total, £130 million was committed to specific projects in the calendar years 1988 to 1990.

Aid Loans

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *564*, what criteria were used to determine the eligibility of developing countries for old aid loans to be converted into grants; and whether these criteria remain the same in considering future conversions of aid loans to grants.

Mrs. Chalker: Britain decided to convert a numberr of outstanding aid loans into grants following a 1978 UNCTAD resolution. Eligibility was based on poverty and a satisfactory human rights record. In addition we now also seek evidence of a commitment to economic reform so that the resources provided through debt relief can be used effectively.

Low-income Countries

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bilateral aid went to low-income countries, as defined by the World bank, in 1990; and what percentage went to least-developed countries, as defined by the United Nations in 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: The percentage of United Kingdom gross bilateral aid to low-income countries, as defined by the World bank, was 71·2 per cent. in 1989, the latest year for which figures are available. The proportion going to the least-developed countries, as defined by the UN, was 31·7 per cent. in 1989.

Net Aid Programme

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the size of the net aid programme, in cash and constant 1990-91 financial year terms, for the financial years 1978-79, 1990-91 and planned figures for 1993-94, showing the percentage change in real terms for each period.

Mrs. Chalker: Following is the Information; figures for the net aid programme in 1990-91 will not be available until the autumn.

Year	*Net Aid programme in cash terms*	*Percentage change on 1978-79*	*Net Aid programme in 1990-91 prices*	*Percentage change on 1978-79*
	£ million		*£ million*	
1978-79	715	—	1,807	—

Year	*Expenditure Plans*	*Percentage change on 1978-79*	*Expenditure Plans*	*Percentage change on 1978-79*
	£ million		*£ million*	
1990-91[1]	1,587	+121·9	1,587	−12·2
1993-94	1,860	+160·1	1,618	−10·5

[1] Original planning figures. During 1990-91 the planned aid programme was increased to allow for additional expenditure on Zambia and the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Turkey (Natural Gas Project)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the developmental purpose of the aid and trade provision-supported natural gas conversion project in Turkey; what is the total value of the contract; over what period the ATP grant is expected to be paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The purpose of this project is to provide a cheaper alternative to other fuels for meeting Ankara's energy demands and to reduce the atmospheric pollution caused by the use of oil, coal and lignite as domestic fuels.

The cost is $200·7 million of which $108·5 million is being financed by a long-term concessional loan to meet the costs of 85 per cent. of the British goods and services. Aid and trade provision grant funds, calculated on exchange rates applying at the date of implementation of the loan and estimated not to exceed £58·7 million, are being provided to support interest payments due on this loan. Repayments of principal will be made over a 20-year repayment period. Allowing for a five-year grace period the final payment will be made in 2013. Payments from the ATP grant to meet interest "make-up" and Export Credits Guarantee Department premium costs have amounted to £6·35 million to date.

The hon. Member will be aware that the figure of £58·7 million differs from that given in my reply to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) on 28 February at column *565*. I have written separately to the hon. Member correcting this latter figure.

WALES

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, I have responsibilities which include the use of energy. The publication of the Welsh Office energy efficiency plan was announced on 8 May 1989 by the then Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), and copies were placed in the Library of the House. The plan is currently being updated to reflect the increasing concern for energy efficiency exemplified by the recently instigated ministerial group on energy efficiency.

Water Rates

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by district authority in Wales the numbers of council tenants evicted, or currently under threat of eviction, by district councils because they are in arrears with respect to payments of water rates, where those rates are charged inclusive of rent by the councils in 1990, and in the first two months of 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available centrally.

Cadw

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the future management arrangements for Cadw.

Mr. David Hunt: I have concluded that Cadw should become an executive agency on 1 April 1991. I shall be announcing the objectives and targets that I have set for the agency shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Moyle Hospital, Larne

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of Moyle hospital, Larne, in the delivery of acute hospital services.

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Health and Social Services has not yet assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of actue services in the Moyle hospital. This is primarily a matter for the Northern health and social services board.

Fire Advisory Panel

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members serve on the Fire advisory panel for Northern Ireland; and how many of those members are also members of the Society of Fire Safety Engineers.

Mr. Needham: There are 30 members who serve on the fire advisory panel which in Northern Ireland is known as the Northern Ireland fire liaison panel. Of these, only one member is also a member of the Society of Fire Safety Engineers.

Job Clubs

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which council districts in Northern Ireland currently have a job club.

Mr. Needham: The Training and Employment Agency provides support for job clubs in the following council districts:

Antrim, Ards, Belfast, Larne, Newtownabbey, North Down, Coleraine, Craigavon, Dungannon, Derry, Newry and Mourne, Omagh.

Fair Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when was the last examination of the employment records of the Bank of Ireland under the provisions of fair employment legislation; and if there has been any progress towards eliminating the underemployment of Protestants in the Bank of Ireland since the first fair employment report on this bank.

Mr. Needham: A report by the Fair Employment Agency in March 1986 dealt with the employment patterns and practices of the five main banks in Northern Ireland, including the Bank of Ireland; a copy of that report is held in the Library. The Fair Employment Commission has decided to make available, upon request, monitoring information from individual concerns following receipt of their monitoring returns for 1991. The Bank of Ireland is required to make its monitoring return by 6 June 1991. This return will indicate the religious composition of its work force and applicants for jobs and will, therefore, enable a comparison to be made with the position as shown in the 1986 report.

Nephrops

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the catch of nephrops in 1988, 1989 and 1990; and what is the projected catch in 1991 based upon the experiences of the first two months of the year.

Mr. Hanley: Landings of nephrops into Northern Ireland totalled 5,344 tonnes, 5,595 tonnes and 5,606 tonnes for the years 1988, 1989 and 1990 respectively. Landings in the first two months of 1988, 1989 and 1990 totalled 423 tonnes, 370 tonnes and 222 tonnes respectively compared with 397 tonnes for the same period in 1991. This does not give a statistically sound basis from which to project the total 1991 landings.

Fish Marketing and Processing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the £15 million in EC grants for the United Kingdom's fish marketing and processing industry for the period 1991 to 1993 will be allocated to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the implementation of this scheme in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Of the £15 million in EC grants, some £1·5 million has been separately allocated to Northern Ireland.

The scheme is open for applicants, but is competitive and not all applicants can be guaranteed support. I hope that the Northern Ireland industry will make full use of the moneys available.

Belfast Action Teams

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the expenditure in each of the Belfast action teams which were created and the projects on which the money was spent.

Mr. Needham: In view of the considerable number of projects involved, it will take some time to collate the information. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as the information is available and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Disability

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications were made by employers for capital grants in each of the financial years since 1985 to enable them to adapt *(a)* premises, and *(b)* equipment, to employ disabled people in Northern Ireland;

(2) what was the total amount of grant aid paid in each financial year since 1985 to employers to enable them to employ disabled people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The number of applications approved and amount of grant aid paid to employers to adapt premises and equipment to enable them to employ disabled people is as follows:

	Number of approved applications	*Grant aid* £
1985-86	3	5,750
1986-87	4	7,860
1987-88	3	2,872
1988-89	7	5,124
1989-90	6	23,000
[1]1990-91	3	8,000

[1] To February 1991.

HEALTH

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what date all hospital incinerators in the United Kingdom will be operating in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 February 1991]:* With the removal of Crown immunity, new incinerators will have to meet the requirements of environmental protection legislation from 1 April 1991. Health authorities and NHS trusts that currently operate incinerators which do not comply with the new standards will be required by 30 September 1991 to agree with the local authority pollution inspectorate a programme for ensuring that all incinerators meet the new standards in full. These agreed programmes will set interim standards which will have to be met.

Although there is a maximum transitional period of five years we have made clear that NHS incinerators must meet as quickly as possible the new standards laid down in environmental protection legislation. We are about to issue guidance on the different options which are available to health authorities and NHS trusts. They include the sharing of facilities across district and regional boundaries and the use of private sector waste management companies.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people who will be eligible for the new lower rate of care component of the disability living allowance by virtue of *(a)* the requirement of attention for a significant portion of the day and *(b)* inability to prepare a cooked meal; what is his estimate of the take-up rate for each group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We expect 140,000 people to receive the lower rate care component of disability living allowance in 1993-94. It is not possible to give any reliable estimates of how many of the anticipated caseload will qualify by each of the alternative routes to entitlement.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe of 28 February, column *610*, what is his estimate of the number and proportion of people who need special diets who will qualify for the new lower rate of care component of the disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Something under 500,000 people below the age of 65 said that they needed a special diet in response to an Office of Population Censuses and Surveys question. Many of this group would be at the lower levels of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys severity scales. The comment in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys fourth report that

"not all the problems included under this heading (eating, drinking, and digesting difficulties) were strictly speaking disabilities",

applies even more strongly to this group. Nevertheless, even after allowing for overlaps between the different rates and components of disability living allowance, we estimate that nearly 200,000 of the people in this group would be in receipt of at least one of the rates of the new benefit.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on 28 February, *Official Report*, column *610*, if he will explain the basis for the increase in his estimate of the number of recipients of the new lower care component of the disability living allowance from paragraph 4.12 of "The Way Ahead"—Cm. 917—to the figure given in his answer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The figure of 240,000 given to the right hon. Member on 28 February 1991 represented the number of people whom we anticipate will be eligible for the new lower rate care component of the disability living allowance. The figure of 140,000 quoted in paragraph 4.12

of "The Way Ahead"—Cm. 917—represents our best estimate of the numbers who will be receiving the new lower rate care component in 1993-94.

Alzheimer's Disease

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people suffering from Alzheimer's disease are in receipt of terminal grant *(a)* in nursing homes and *(b)* in residential homes.

Miss Widdecombe: Details of conditions suffered by claimants in receipt of the terminal illness limit of income support are not collected by the Department.

Mobility Allowance

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made on introducing regulations to guarantee the mobility allowance entitlement of double leg amputees.

Mr. Scott: I am extremely pleased to announce that regulations have been laid today which come into force on 10 April 1991. These will ensure the eligibility to mobility allowance of people who are without both legs for any reason, including amputation. I am also glad to state that the regulations will allow these claims to be fast tracked. That is, they could be decided without a medical examination if suitable evidence about the person's medical condition, such as a general practitioner's letter or previous medical report, is available.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate the savings to the Exchequer arising from the failure to increase unemployment benefit in line with average earnings since 1979; and if he will specify the saving in 1990 and the anticipated saving in 1991.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 March 1991]:* Unemployment benefit is increased annually in line with the retail prices index. If the benefit had been uprated in line with average earnings from 1979 onwards the estimated net additional cost in the financial year 1990-91 would be £125 million and in 1991-92 £150 million. Estimates for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Family Credit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are dependent on *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit broken down into claimants, dependants and children for (i) Leeds, West, (ii) Leeds metropolitan district council area, *(iii)* West Yorkshire and *(iv)* England.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 6 March 1991, c. 72.]:* I regret that information was omitted from my reply. The correct information is as follows:

Income Support and Family Credit

Information for Leeds, West, Leeds metropolitan district council area and West Yorkshire is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information in respect of England is as follows:

	Claimants	*Dependants*	*Children*	*Total*
Income support[1]	3,429,000	599,000	1,688,000	5,716,000
Family credit[2]	264,000	164,000	569,000	997,000

[1] Data derived from 1989 annual statistical inquiry.
[2] Data derived from 5 per cent. sample of family credit caseload at 31 July 1990.

Housing Benefit

Information for Leeds, West is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information in respect of the metropolitan borough of Leeds, West Yorkshire and England is as follows:

	[1]*Claimants*	[1]*Dependants*	*Children*	[1]*Total*
Metropolitan Borough of Leeds	63,700	[2]18,000	Not available	81,700
West Yorkshire	159,100	[2]44,800	Not available	163,900
England	3,153,000	[2]902,000	Not available	4,055,000

[1] Data relate to August 1990 and is in respect of those receiving either rent rebate or rent allowance only.
[2] Partially estimated.

ENVIRONMENT

Seals and Dolphins

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to prevent the disappearance of seals and dolphins from United Kingdom coastal waters.

Mr. Trippier: Preliminary indications are that our coastal waters continue to support a wide range of marine mammal species and regular surveys carried out for Government by the Natural Environment Research Council's sea mammal research unit show that grey seal populations continue to increase. Common seal numbers are now stable following the 1988 viral epidemic, and we hope to see signs of recovery soon. As far as dolphins are concerned no reliable estimates of population are available.

My Department has already commissioned a number of new research projects on marine mammals including the appointment of a co-ordinator to oversee the recording and sampling of marine mammal strandings in England and Wales, the carrying out of post mortem and

contaminant analysis for selected cetaceans, including dolphins, washed ashore and support for improved sighting schemes and population studies.

More generally the initiatives we have taken to implement measures agreed at the third North sea conference, held in the Hague in March 1990, which apply to all our coastal waters, will do much to improve the quality of our seas. Marine mammals may be particularly at risk from PCBs which can accumulate in their fatty tissues and notable amongst the third conference measures is the agreement to phase out and destroy all remaining identifiable uses of PCBs by 1999.

River Pollution

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to amend the criteria used to determine river quality so as to reflect pollutant levels in river life.

Mr. Trippier: We are currently reviewing with the National Rivers Authority the existing schemes for classifying river quality in conjunction with the work of developing the system of statutory quality objectives provided for in the Water Act 1989. The outcome of the review will be published for consultation in due course.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ask the district auditor to review the action of councils and councillors when a substantial proportion of the community charge has not been collected.

Mr. Key: All community chargepayers have a right to expect their local authority to collect the charge in a diligent and economic manner. The Audit Commission has published useful guidance to local authorities on improving collection performance. In general local authorities are seeking to collect the charge efficiently. I would expect that there are no cases where action by councillors is impeding effective collection, but if there were the auditor already has a duty to under section 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to certify, where a loss has been incurred or deficiency caused by wilful misconduct of any person, that the amount of that loss or deficiency is due from that person. The auditor may recover the amount for the benefit of the authority from that person concerned. Councillors may therefore be liable for uncollected community charges where the failure to collect results from their misconduct.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the various guidance circulars he has issued to local authorities concerning collection of the poll tax.

Mr. Key: My Department issued a practice note to local authorities covering all aspects of the collection of the community charge. A copy is in the Library. The note is currently being revised and updated by the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households he expects to benefit from the new community charge reduction scheme in Berwick borough, Castle Morpeth borough and Alnwick district.

Mr. Key: Information on the number of people expected to benefit from the community charge reduction scheme broken down by local authority areas will be available once authorities have returned their initial grant claim forms.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the year on year increase in standard spending assessment for 1991-92 in respect of *(a)* Westminster, *(b)* Salford, *(c)* Wigan and *(d)* Bolton.

Mr. Key: The percentage increases in SSA between 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows:
(a) 22·1, *(b)* 16·3, *(c)* 18·6 and *(d)* 17·9.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, in tabular form, *(a)* the establishment of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and *(b)* the number of staff employed for each year since 1987.

Mr. Baldry: The complement and number of staff in post in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution from its formation in 1987 are set out in the table.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution staffing[1]

Year (1 April)	Complement	Number of staff in post
1987	199	133
1988	183	158
1989	194	165
1990	212	172
1991	248	[2]232

Notes: [1]All figures exclude the former radioactive waste policy and administrative division, (25 administrative, 2 professional staff) which transferred from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to the DOE directorate of pollution control and waste in November 1990.
[2]1 March.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's complement has been authorised to expand to over 300 by 1 April 1992 and may require a further increase to around 400 when integrated pollution control is in full operation.

A recruitment competition for pollution inspectors has recently been completed, and has produced 38 successful candidates to fill the remaining vacancies and authorised new posts.

Beaches

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will detail the criteria used to assess the level of pollution on British beaches.

Mr. Baldry: Bathing water quality is assessed according to standards set out in directive 76/160/EEC.

Environmental Action Guide

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the "Environmental Action Guide" was issued to Government Departments; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: An initial working version of the "Environmental Action Guide" was circulated to all Government Departments immediately following publication of the environment White Paper last year. The guide

itself, together with the first of a continuing series of advisory notes on specific environmental topics such as CFCs and timber in buildings, will be published by HMSO shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990 to 28 February 1991, how many planning applications have been determined by Leeds development corporation *(a)* within one month of receipt, *(b)* between one and two months of receipt and *(c)* after more than two months of receipt.

Mr. Key: Information is not collected in the format requested. The available information shows that, for the year ending September 1989, 131 planning applications were decided by the Development Corporation of which 57 per cent. were determined within eight weeks of receipt. For the year ending September 1990, 179 applications were decided of which 58 per cent. were determined within eight weeks.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to allow the Rural Development Commission to retain receipts from the sale of its portfolio; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: It is our policy that the Rural Development Commission should retain receipts from the sale of their workspace portfolio: up to the targets agreed for each year. The receipts are used to finance the commission's agreed expenditure.

Environment Council

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 18 March.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend the Minister for Environment and Countryside and I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

The Council agreed a common position on a directive to tighten up controls on emissions from lorries and buses. The United Kingdom took a lead in pressing for this measure, which will introduce strict new pollution standards for large diesel engined vehicles to match those set last year for cars. The controls, which will come into effect in 1995 and 1996, represent the toughest achievable standards. The motor industry will have a clear target and a manageable timetable for the substantial work which now needs to be done.

Agreement was reached on a directive setting minimum standards for the collection and treatment of sewage. The so-called municipal waste water directive requires that all communities above a certain size should be provided with sewerage systems, and that sewage should in general receive full secondary treatment before it can be discharged. Additional treatment to remove nutrient substances is required where this is necessary to protect the water environment. The directive also allows for primary treatment only for certain coastal discharges where this can be demonstrated to be sufficient to protect the environment. Other provisions require treatment of analagous industrial discharges, and an end to the disposal of sewage sludge at sea. This measure represents a major step forward in the protection of the water environment throughout the community. The Government's decision last year to introduce treatment for all remaining major coastal discharges, and the huge investment programme put in place at the time of water privatisation, means that the United Kingdom is well placed to comply with the directive.

The Council agreed a common position on a directive amending for the seventh time directive 67/548/EEC on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances. The amending directive updates requirements for manufacturers or importers of a new chemical substance to provide data on its hazardous properties. It introduces harmonised notification requirements for substances produced in small quantities, with exceptions in certain circumstances to encourage research and development.

A directive on the content and disposal of batteries and a new framework directive on waste management, the substance of which had been agreed at previous meetings, were formally adopted by the Council.

The Council had a useful discussion on aspects of a proposed regulation controlling the movement of waste within, into and out of the European Community. The United Kingdom, supported by other member states, stressed the importance of incorporating the principle of self-sufficiency in waste disposal, both within countries and for the Community as a whole.

Proposals for a directive to protect fauna, flora and habitats, and for a Community ecological labelling scheme were briefly discussed. In both cases the United Kingdom called for the measures to be agreed as soon as possible, and the presidency said it would seek agreement at the next Environment Council.

The Council had preliminary discussions on two new proposals on the evaluation and control of environmental risks from existing chemicals, and on a Community environment fund—LIFE.

The Council also discussed action taken by member states and the Commission in response to environmental problems in the Gulf. Ministers were briefed by Mr. Al Arrayed, Health Minister of Bahrain, on the environmental situation in the Gulf states. Member states welcomed the efforts co-ordinated by the European Commission to complement initiatives by the International Maritime Organisation and the United Nations Environmental Programme. The Council agreed on the need to provide further assistance to the Gulf clean-up operations, and to develop proposals for responding to similar disasters in the future in collaboration with member states and other international organisations.

Sea Bathing

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department expects to announce the results of the 1990 study into the health risks of sea bathing; and whether those studies are to continue.

Mr. Trippier: The Department is awarding a further contract to the Water Research Centre to manage large-scale studies into the health risks of sea bathing using the methodologies developed over the last two years. The

WRC will invite tenders from suitably qualified professional institutions and organisations to undertake these studies.

The research will be jointly funded by my Department, the Department of Health, Welsh Office and the National Rivers Authority. It will be undertaken at selected bathing beaches where the waters are of different microbiological quality to allow a further investigation of the relationship between the levels of contamination and the incidence of illness.

The results of the 1990 studies at Moreton (Wirral) and Ramsgate will be placed in the Library in early April.

Community Charge

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his latest estimate for each local authority in England of *(a)* the community charge for 1990-91, *(b)* the charge set for 1991-92 before the new grant announced on 19 March, *(c)* the charge for 1991-92 after the new grant, *(d)* the bill in 1991-92 after the community charge reduction scheme for a couple who had 75 per cent. of the average rateable value for their area and *(e)* the bill in 1991-92 for a couple who had 50 per cent. of the average rateable value for their area.

Mr. Portillo: The new grant announced yesterday will reduce charges set in England in 1991-92 by £140, or to zero where the local charge was below that figure. The details are as follows:

Notes to table

Column 1: shows the headline community charge set on average in each authority for 1990-91;

Column 2: shows the latest information available to the Department of the Environment on community charges actually set in each authority for 1991-92. For most authorities the information is taken from returns to the Department; but in some cases the figures are taken from press reports or other sources;

Column 3: shows what the 1991-92 charge in column 2 will be after the £140 reduction announced on 19 March;

Column 4: shows the combined charge bill which will be paid by a *couple* living in a property with 75 per cent. of the average rateable value for their area, after any help they receive from the community charge reduction scheme;

Column 5: is the same as column 4 but for a couple living in a property with 50 per cent. of the average rateable value for their area.

The community charge paid by many people will be less than shown in column 3 of the table. Some will be helped by the community charge reduction scheme and people on low incomes may be entitled to a reduction of up to 80 per cent. through community charge benefit.

The community charge reduction scheme helps those who have not moved since 1 April 1990 and who face an increase of more than £2 a week over their last rate bill, counting a maximum of two charges for their property. When first introduced, the Government published a "scheme charge" for each authority which was to be used to calculate the reduction to be given, unless the actual charge set were lower. This new grant means that actual charges set for 1991-92 will in every case be lower than the scheme charge and will thus form the basis for the reduction scheme. Therefore, one and two-adult households who have not moved should nowhere pay more than about £2 a week above what they paid in rates in 1989-90.

1991-92 Community Charges

	1990-91 charge	*1991-92 charge set*	*New 1991-92 charge*	*Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV*	*Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV*
	(£ adult)	*(£ adult)*	*(£ adult)*	*(£ couple)*	*(£ couple)*
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Total England	357	392	252	456	356
Total inner London boroughs including City	352	359	219	376	307
Total outer London boroughs	356	394	254	495	405
Total shire areas	357	390	250	449	352
Total Metropolitan areas	360	403	263	476	358
Greater London					
City of London	288	315	175	350	350
Camden	500	440	300	600	461
Greenwich	350	398	258	506	372
Hackney	499	462	322	514	377
Hammersmith and Fulham	321	387	247	494	400
Islington	481	516	376	613	444
Kensington and Chelsea	379	329	189	379	379
Lambeth	522	590	450	491	362
Lewisham	297	308	168	336	336
Southwark	329	328	188	377	330
Tower Hamlets	297	287	147	294	294
Wandsworth	150	137	0	0	0
Westminster	199	176	36	72	72
Barking and Dagenham	280	310	170	340	328
Barnet	338	387	247	494	460
Bexley	280	342	202	404	333
Brent	470	470	330	660	588
Bromley	283	330	190	380	339
Croydon	287	320	180	360	354
Ealing	435	395	255	510	421
Enfield	329	388	248	496	399
Haringey	508	560	420	782	556
Harrow	322	393	253	506	411

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Havering	350	369	229	458	355
Hillingdon	290	355	215	430	405
Hounslow	396	425	285	570	431
Kingston upon Thames	345	379	239	478	395
Merton	280	409	269	480	354
Newham	449	444	304	575	418
Redbridge	290	395	255	440	328
Richmond upon Thames	395	419	279	558	417
Sutton	381	400	260	519	390
Waltham Forest	438	437	297	541	395
Greater Manchester					
Bolton	345	406	266	439	327
Bury	373	436	296	527	386
Manchester	425	432	292	549	401
Oldham	366	409	269	433	323
Rochdale	335	389	249	459	341
Salford	396	440	300	499	367
Stockport	399	450	310	536	392
Tameside	349	410	270	456	338
Trafford	298	345	205	430	381
Wigan	348	408	268	485	358
Merseyside					
Knowsley	370	425	285	552	402
Liverpool	449	474	334	525	385
Sefton	375	423	283	534	391
St. Helens	380	401	261	504	371
Wirral	341	476	336	635	458
South Yorkshire					
Barnsley	271	325	185	369	309
Doncaster	303	343	203	406	346
Rotherham	298	372	232	450	335
Sheffield	356	360	220	441	367
Tyne and Wear					
Gateshead	321	367	227	419	314
Newcastle upon Tyne	391	456	316	490	361
North Tyneside	354	425	285	524	384
South Tyneside	309	360	220	430	321
Sunderland	310	355	215	413	310
West Midlands					
Birmingham	406	406	266	498	367
Coventry	394	434	294	534	391
Dudley	387	415	275	529	387
Sandwell	423	459	319	495	365
Solihull	393	396	256	512	402
Walsall	425	425	285	563	410
Wolverhampton	418	415	275	544	398
West Yorkshire					
Bradford	276	363	223	409	307
Calderdale	248	318	178	355	320
Kirklees	290	380	240	396	299
Leeds	351	409	269	411	308
Wakefield	313	353	213	426	325
Avon					
Bath	348	385	245	457	339
Bristol	425	524	384	515	378
Kingswood	357	399	259	485	358
Northavon	385	407	267	530	388
Wansdyke	361	424	284	509	374
Woodspring	394	444	304	551	402
Bedfordshire					
Luton	403	390	250	500	435
Mid Bedfordshire	397	406	266	532	421
North Bedfordshire	398	404	264	527	396
South Bedfordshire	414	418	278	556	456

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Berkshire					
Bracknell Forest	393	369	229	458	375
Newbury	401	386	246	491	376
Reading	447	474	334	491	362
Slough	360	331	191	382	351
Windsor and Maidenhead	449	428	288	575	421
Wokingham	434	404	264	527	445
Buckinghamshire					
Aylesbury Vale	352	351	211	422	384
Chiltern	402	391	251	502	502
Milton Keynes	398	455	315	513	377
South Buckinghamshire	393	361	221	442	442
Wycombe	409	408	268	536	464
Cambridgeshire					
Cambridge	428	469	329	569	414
East Cambridgeshire	312	355	215	414	311
Fenland	293	372	232	396	299
Huntingdonshire	298	336	196	393	337
Peterborough	360	407	267	460	341
South Cambridgeshire	332	345	205	409	392
Cheshire					
Chester	401	449	309	524	384
Congleton	400	433	293	516	379
Crewe and Nantwich	417	452	312	493	363
Ellesmere Port and Neston	406	449	309	523	383
Halton	395	465	325	456	339
Macclesfield	430	423	283	565	427
Vale Royal	391	432	292	485	358
Warrington	394	440	300	481	355
Cleveland					
Hartlepool	385	437	297	454	337
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	421	478	338	529	387
Middlesbrough	429	457	317	494	364
Stockton-on-Tees	428	440	300	533	390
Cornwall					
Caradon	321	376	236	389	294
Carrick	318	391	251	395	298
Kerrier	329	387	247	371	282
North Cornwall	311	354	214	394	297
Penwith	317	365	225	362	276
Restormel	321	365	225	389	294
Cumbria					
Allerdale	289	352	212	383	290
Barrow-in-Furness	328	416	276	368	280
Carlisle	367	439	299	410	308
Copeland	328	368	228	371	282
Eden	297	357	217	384	291
South Lakeland	349	414	274	442	329
Derbyshire					
Amber Valley	342	397	257	451	335
Bolsover	296	352	212	423	317
Chesterfield	358	405	265	451	336
Derby	399	410	270	509	374
Derbyshire Dales	376	417	277	494	364
Erewash	363	414	274	468	347
High Peak	337	401	261	457	340
North East Derbyshire	364	419	279	496	365
South Derbyshire	384	437	297	499	367
Devon					
East Devon	345	383	243	430	321
Exeter	344	377	237	404	304
Mid Devon	338	394	254	380	288
North Devon	319	384	244	363	277

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Plymouth	350	380	240	432	323
South Hams	334	380	240	422	316
Teignbridge	365	405	265	422	316
Torbay	395	380	240	470	348
Torridge	285	346	206	333	257
West Devon	340	370	230	393	296
Dorset					
Bournemouth	320	348	208	416	344
Christchurch	339	356	216	432	357
East Dorset	358	386	246	492	396
North Dorset	295	340	200	399	307
Poole	325	340	200	400	362
Purbeck	291	318	178	355	325
West Dorset	313	355	215	388	294
Weymouth and Portland	336	380	240	407	306
Durham					
Chester-Le-Street	343	409	269	440	328
Darlington	356	416	276	462	343
Derwentside	332	416	276	405	305
Durham	355	419	279	449	334
Easington	278	350	210	377	286
Sedgefield	303	370	230	416	312
Teesdale	245	313	173	341	262
Wear Valley	308	337	197	383	290
East Sussex					
Brighton	373	396	256	507	372
Eastbourne	385	414	274	544	398
Hastings	380	414	274	453	337
Hove	330	337	197	394	358
Lewes	351	384	244	489	393
Rother	359	372	232	464	390
Wealden	349	387	247	493	376
Essex					
Basildon	443	495	355	689	494
Braintree	348	357	217	434	376
Brentwood	375	369	229	458	458
Castle Point	377	355	215	430	423
Chelmsford	397	368	228	456	438
Colchester	335	348	208	416	381
Epping Forest	381	388	248	497	477
Harlow	425	459	319	638	478
Maldon	347	343	203	406	406
Rochford	388	357	217	434	434
Southend-on-Sea	378	348	208	416	416
Tendring	346	346	206	411	376
Thurrock	417	408	268	536	434
Uttlesford	357	348	208	416	416
Gloucestershire					
Cheltenham	364	416	276	472	349
Cotswold	389	394	254	503	370
Forest of Dean	342	412	272	388	293
Gloucester	354	401	261	408	307
Stroud	380	445	305	452	336
Tewkesbury	362	385	245	477	353
Hampshire					
Basingstoke and Deane	323	327	187	374	336
East Hampshire	368	363	223	447	381
Eastleigh	368	385	245	474	351
Fareham	360	365	225	450	374
Gosport	340	386	246	431	322
Hart	395	365	225	451	421
Havant	339	369	229	459	356
New Forest	328	339	199	398	341
Portsmouth	309	319	179	358	308
Rushmoor	325	358	218	436	357
Southampton	317	395	255	405	305

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Test Valley	329	320	180	361	359
Winchester	359	352	212	424	379
Hereford and Worcester					
Bromsgrove	339	362	222	444	357
Hereford	289	351	211	341	262
Leominster	281	341	201	357	273
Malvern Hills	343	379	239	463	343
Redditch	345	402	262	463	343
South Herefordshire	279	327	187	369	281
Worcester	340	397	257	452	336
Wychavon	324	358	218	435	362
Wyre Forest	343	393	253	440	328
Hertfordshire					
Broxbourne	361	361	221	441	412
Dacorum	400	367	227	454	439
East Hertfordshire	379	369	229	458	428
Hertsmere	416	369	229	457	457
North Hertfordshire	399	369	229	458	440
St. Albans	396	383	243	487	471
Stevenage	435	433	293	586	452
Three Rivers	423	415	275	551	512
Watford	404	434	294	574	417
Welwyn Hatfield	445	459	319	638	478
Humberside					
Beverley	373	426	286	564	411
Boothferry	291	360	220	416	312
Cleethorpes	367	434	294	476	352
East Yorkshire	326	387	247	437	326
Glanford	361	424	284	459	341
Great Grimsby	384	431	291	443	330
Holderness	364	427	288	467	346
Kingston upon Hull	307	370	230	402	303
Scunthorpe	356	409	269	480	355
Isle of Wight					
Medina	342	335	195	390	328
South Wight	374	378	238	476	354
Kent					
Ashford	299	316	176	352	328
Canterbury	300	334	194	388	314
Dartford	330	345	205	405	305
Dover	298	333	193	383	290
Gillingham	285	313	173	345	299
Gravesham	294	294	154	308	308
Maidstone	330	358	218	429	320
Rochester upon Medway	249	191	51	102	102
Sevenoaks	308	331	191	382	341
Shepway	347	343	203	407	342
Swale	301	334	194	359	274
Thanet	300	315	175	349	316
Tonbridge and Malling	320	348	208	417	323
Tunbridge Wells	315	348	208	417	321
Lancashire					
Blackburn	365	427	287	354	271
Blackpool	384	434	294	451	335
Burnley	299	349	209	328	253
Chorley	363	434	294	424	317
Fylde	388	408	268	494	364
Hyndburn	315	383	243	338	260
Lancaster	385	419	279	408	307
Pendle	299	358	218	329	254
Preston	384	454	314	418	313
Ribble Valley	358	413	273	439	327
Rossendale	338	401	261	368	280
South Ribble	367	427	287	423	317
West Lancashire	378	400	260	497	366
Wyre	376	399	259	446	332

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Leicestershire					
Blaby	343	368	228	456	361
Charnwood	372	397	257	481	355
Harborough	367	405	265	529	387
Hinckley and Bosworth	347	378	238	469	347
Leicester	405	459	319	427	320
Melton	339	390	250	457	339
North West Leicestershire	366	407	267	457	339
Oadby and Wigston	370	427	287	509	374
Rutland	370	394	254	508	373
Lincolnshire					
Boston	280	355	215	379	288
East Lindsey	277	358	218	371	282
Lincoln	284	364	224	359	274
North Kesteven	282	345	205	401	302
South Holland	284	357	217	392	296
South Kesteven	279	340	200	399	301
West Lindsey	286	350	210	387	293
Norfolk					
Breckland	310	375	235	404	304
Broadland	320	368	228	453	337
Great Yarmouth	326	400	260	386	292
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	285	344	204	381	289
North Norfolk	291	325	185	369	296
Norwich	365	433	293	424	317
South Norfolk	313	370	230	446	332
Northamptonshire					
Corby	350	390	250	445	331
Daventry	354	389	249	498	386
East Northamptonshire	306	360	220	425	318
Kettering	323	370	230	436	325
Northampton	349	366	226	453	369
South Northamptonshire	3[illegible]	366	226	453	372
Wellingborough	288	269	129	258	258
Northumberland					
Alnwick	347	397	257	432	323
Berwick-upon-Tweed	323	360	220	396	299
Blyth Valley	415	440	300	474	351
Castle Morpeth	437	444	304	555	404
Tynedale	389	443	303	448	333
Wansbeck	348	395	255	426	318
North Yorkshire					
Craven	256	311	171	343	280
Hambleton	312	330	190	381	330
Harrogate	362	394	254	470	348
Richmondshire	276	329	189	379	325
Ryedale	289	347	207	396	299
Scarborough	276	324	184	368	287
Selby	283	345	205	401	302
York	264	324	184	345	265
Nottinghamshire					
Ashfield	320	385	245	394	297
Bassetlaw	371	436	296	431	322
Broxtowe	380	405	265	465	345
Gedling	371	407	267	481	356
Mansfield	378	435	295	421	315
Newark and Sherwood	377	413	273	437	326
Nottingham	390	435	295	432	323
Rushcliffe	394	405	265	525	385
Oxfordshire					
Cherwell	385	389	249	498	370
Oxford	489	484	344	590	428
South Oxfordshire	456	449	309	555	405

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
Vale of White Horse	412	405	265	531	394
West Oxfordshire	412	380	240	481	370
Shropshire					
Bridgnorth	315	351	211	421	336
North Shropshire	317	366	226	417	313
Oswestry	329	403	263	387	293
Shrewsbury and Atcham	333	403	263	442	329
South Shropshire	310	372	232	376	286
The Wrekin	383	428	288	458	340
Somerset					
Mendip	361	415	275	449	334
Sedgemoor	353	388	248	458	340
South Somerset	363	411	271	452	336
Taunton Deane	351	386	246	444	331
West Somerset	335	396	256	448	333
Staffordshire					
Cannock Chase	356	409	269	460	342
East Staffordshire	338	384	244	431	322
Lichfield	349	376	236	472	401
Newcastle-under-Lyme	349	409	269	440	328
South Staffordshire	325	349	209	418	395
Stafford	339	376	236	473	354
Staffordshire Moorlands	323	377	237	444	331
Stoke-on-Trent	313	412	272	391	295
Tamworth	329	386	246	467	346
Suffolk					
Babergh	330	375	235	453	337
Forest Heath	372	357	217	410	308
Ipswich	440	464	324	471	349
Mid Suffolk	332	370	230	440	328
St. Edmundsbury	319	379	239	429	321
Suffolk Coastal	390	370	230	461	363
Waveney	350	392	252	406	305
Surrey					
Elmbridge	449	479	339	677	502
Epsom and Ewell	452	467	327	654	491
Guildford	400	391	251	501	406
Mole Valley	388	395	255	510	404
Reigate and Banstead	445	411	271	542	432
Runnymede	295	338	198	396	380
Spelthorne	368	387	247	488	360
Surrey Heath	401	393	253	505	448
Tandridge	373	413	273	540	395
Waverley	410	396	256	512	432
Woking	359	400	260	519	425
Warwickshire					
North Warwickshire	391	459	319	544	397
Nuneaton and Bedworth	386	476	336	536	392
Rugby	347	428	288	536	392
Stratford-on-Avon	381	414	274	549	447
Warwick	386	409	269	538	439
West Sussex					
Adur	351	406	266	470	348
Arun	314	360	220	440	336
Chichester	303	310	170	341	341
Crawley	345	375	235	449	334
Horsham	304	329	189	378	337
Mid Sussex	317	345	205	410	373
Worthing	296	335	195	390	326
Wiltshire					
Kennet	307	353	213	425	340
North Wiltshire	323	379	239	438	327
Salisbury	313	348	208	417	352
Thamesdown	337	399	259	436	325

	1990-91 charge (£ adult) 1	1991-92 charge set (£ adult) 2	New 1991-92 charge (£ adult) 3	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 75 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 4	Bill for couple after charge reduction scheme at 50 per cent. average RV (£ couple) 5
West Wiltshire	333	378	238	434	324
All Purpose Authority					
Isles of Scilly	280	245	105	210	210

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest information he has, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, on the number of employment training participants who fall either within *(a)* the Guarantee group and *(b)* the Aim group; if he will give comparable data for one year ago; and if he will make a statement about how he intends to monitor participation by both groups when ET is delivered by training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's guarantee and aim covers a range of options to help unemployed people back to work: from employment training provided through TECs to others offered by the Employment Service. My Department monitors the provision offered by TECs in the light of the overall position.

The information requested is provided in the following table.

Employment training
Aim and guarantee group entrants[1]

Region	April to September 1989 Guarantee (per cent.)	April to September 1989 Aim (per cent.)	April to September 1990 Guarantee (per cent.)	April to September 1990 Aim (per cent.)
South East	8	26	9	18
London	11	32	12	21
South West	13	25	13	16
West Midlands	13	30	13	26
East Midlands and Eastern	15	31	15	20
Yorkshire and Humberside	16	27	15	21
North West	14	31	13	23
Northern	18	28	16	24
Wales	16	26	14	21
Scotland	17	33	15	28
Great Britain	15	30	14	23

[1] Estimated.

Note: Great Britain total includes a small number of trainees covered by national contracts and residential training colleges not included in regional totals. The table shows the latest information for this financial year and comparable data for the previous year.

Source: ET management information system and ET starts database.

Cathedral Employment Enterprises

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the grant to Cathedral Employment Enterprises for projects in Wandsworth for each of the last three years.

Mr. Jackson: Details of the grants to Cathedral Employment Enterprises for projects in Wandsworth are available only for the last two years. The amounts are:

	£
1989-90	564,355
1990-91	[1]478,822

[1] This figure includes an estimate for March 1991.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussion he has had with Cathedral Employment Enterprises on future funding of (i) the Earlsfield job club, (ii) English for Asian girls project, Earlsfield, (iii) general office skills training, Earlsfield, and (iv) Milan Asian Centre, Tooting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: (i) The current contract with Earlsfield job club expires on 28 June 1991. The award of a contract beyond that date will be subject to competitive tendering during April/May.

(ii)-(iv) These projects are currently subject to negotiation by AZTEC.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to review the guarantee that all 16-year-olds with special needs will be offered a place, if they so wish, on a youth training scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government remain fully committed to the guarantee of the offer of a suitable YT place to all young people who are under 18, not in full-time education or in a job and who are seeking entry to YT.

This applies to young people with special needs as well as to all other young people. Trainees with special training needs are identified by a process of endorsement, and

training and enterprise councils—and, where relevant, area offices of the Employment Department—are obliged to provide suitable high-quality training for them.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Female Circumcision

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to curtail the activities of persons entering the country to perform circumcision operations on female children.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Female circumcision is a criminal offence. On convicting a person who does not have the right of abode of such an offence it would be open to a court to recommend deportation.

Life Sentences

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted murderers are at present in prison serving life sentences; and what is the cost of keeping one such prisoner in prison for *(a)* 15, *(b)* 20 or *(c)* 25 years.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 31 December 1990, the latest date for which figures are readily available, it is estimated that 2,300 prisoners were serving life sentences for murder in prison establishments in England and Wales. Detainees during Her Majesty's pleasure and persons sentenced to custody for life are included. It is not possible to distinguish the costs of holding a particular class of prisoner; the average cost of holding a prisoner was £321 per week in the year ending 31 March 1990.

Escapees

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Spring Hall open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Spring Hill open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	46
1989	49
1990	73

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Spring Hill open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	45
1989	48
1990	57

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years.

	Number
1988	1
1989	Nil
1990	7

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from North Sea Camp open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from North Sea Camp open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	5
1989	32
1990	22

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from North Sea Camp open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	5
1989	31
1990	20

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, none was sentenced for drug-related offences.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Morton Hall open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Morton Hall open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	36
1989	34
1990	37

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Morton Hall open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	35
1989	34
1990	36

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, none was sentenced for drug-related offences.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Standford Hill open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Standford Hill open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	79
1989	110
1990	122

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Standford Hill open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	69
1989	105
1990	97

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years.

	Number
1988	2
1989	2
1990	2

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Rudgate open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Rudgate open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	98
1989	120
1990	107

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Rudgate open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	96
1989	119
1990	102

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, none was sentenced for drug-related offences.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from East Sutton Park open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from East Sutton Park open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	20
1989	19
1990	51

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from East Sutton Park open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	15
1989	7
1990	23

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years.

	Number
1988	nil
1989	8
1990	25

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Askham Grange open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Askham Grange open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	13
1989	12
1990	7

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Askham Grange open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	6
1989	11
1990	5

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years:

	Number
1988	1
1989	1
1990	Nil

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Leyhill open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Leyhill open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	32
1989	28
1990	16

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Leyhill open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	31
1989	28
1990	12

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, none was sentenced for drug-related offences.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Kirkham open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Kirkham open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	167
1989	147
1990	145

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Kirkham open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	162
1989	145
1990	133

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years.

	Number
1988	Nil
1989	Nil
1990	1

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Highpoint open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that this prison's records for 1988 are not available. The number of prisoners who absconded from Highpoint open prison in 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1989	1
1990	10

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Highpoint open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1989	1
1990	5

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each year.

	Number
1989	Nil
1990	1

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Ford open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Ford open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	79
1989	74
1990	71

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Ford open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	71
1989	64
1990	61

Of those who remain unlawfully at large, the number sentenced for drug-related offences is as follows for each of the three years.

	Number
1988	1
1989	Nil
1990	1

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from Sudbury open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990; how many were recaptured in each year; and how many of those not recaptured were drug offenders.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners who absconded from Sudbury open prison in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was as follows:

	Number
1988	111
1989	92
1990	90

In each of those years the number of prisoners unlawfully at large from Sudbury open prison who were recaptured was as follows:

	Number
1988	106
1989	82
1990	75

Of those who remain unlawfully at large none was sentenced for drug-related offences.

Electoral Registration

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will consider bringing in legislation to enable women escaping domestic violence to register as electors without revealing their new addresses;

(2) how many representations he has received asking for women fleeing domestic violence to be able to register as electors without revealing their new addresses.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since September 1989 we have received four letters from hon. Members, five from local authorities and six from members of the public on this issue. I recognise that the hon. Member has raised a matter of genuine concern, but there are important democratic reasons for publishing the names and addresses of registered electors which make an amendment of the existing electoral law in the way proposed unacceptable.

Hunting

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list Government funds made available to fox hunts in England and Wales since 1979.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office has made no such funds available to fox hunts.

Drug Offences

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions with prison sentences there have been in each of the last three years for drug-related offences.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is contained in table 3.4 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Statistics of the misuse of drugs: seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1989", a copy of which is in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Eskbank Bypass

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date he expects the A7 Edinburgh to Galashiels trunk route bypass of Eskbank to be opened to traffic.

Mr. Lang: Construction work on the A7 Dalkeith western bypass is expected to be completed and the road opened to traffic this summer several months ahead of schedule.

Historic Buildings Council

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those persons who have, directly or indirectly, been in receipt of grants from the Historic Buildings Council in each of the past 10 years, while serving as members of the council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Historic building repair grants are awarded by my right hon. Friend, having first taken advice from the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland. In the past 10 years, one member of the council, Mr. Marc Ellington, has received historic building repair grant on one listed building while serving as a member of the council.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many grants have been authorised by the Historic Buildings Council in respect of Towie Barclay castle; what has been the value in each case; and in which years they were made.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following historic building repair grants were approved for Towie Barclay castle and steadings:

	Amount of grant £	*Paid*
Towie Barclay castle		
Phase I	8,800	1972-74
Phase II	2,000	1976-77
Towie Barclay castle steadings	36,684	1987-89

Tourism

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what level of financial support his Department has given to tourism in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 14 March 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure £ million (cash)*
1985-86	18·0
1986-87	21·5
1987-88	17·3
1988-89	18·7
1989-90	22·0

Notes:

1. The figures for 1985-89 are in respect of expenditure on the promotion of tourism by the Scottish Tourist Board, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Scottish Development Agency. The figure for 1989-90 is in respect of the Scottish Tourist Board and the Highlands and Islands Development Board only.
2. Information in respect of the Scottish Development Agency for that year could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The Scottish Development Agency is involved in many projects with a tourism element, including training initiatives relevant to tourism, support for conferences held in Scotland, strategic studies, physical works, small business advice and environmental renewal.
3. Provision by the Highlands and Islands Development Board is through its marketing and projects programmes and under its section 8 assistance scheme; the figures do not include salary and administration costs incurred by the Board.
4. Total expenditure by the Scottish Tourist Board is provided, including salary and administration costs, in performing its statutory functions of promoting Scotland as a tourist destination, both within the United Kingdom and overseas, and encouraging investment in tourism infrastructure.

Shackleton Crash (South Harris)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons it was decided not to hold a fatal accident inquiry into the RAF Shackleton crash on South Harris in 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* I have been asked to reply.

On behalf of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, who has responsibility for fatal accident inquiries, I advise the hon. Member that the question

whether such an inquiry should be held received careful consideration. It is not the practice of the Lord Advocate, however, to divulge his reasons for deciding not to hold an inquiry.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telephone Use

15. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on proposals relating to low telephone users.

Mr. Lilley: British Telecom has agreed to introduce an improved and better targeted low user scheme this year. Low users will be able to opt to pay only half the standard rental, and get 30 free call units per quarter. The new scheme will be focused to benefit people who rely on the telephone as a lifeline. BT expects that more than 2 million people will be eligible for the new scheme.

Telecommunications

19. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the growth in telecommunications since 1984.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom has one of the fastest growing telecommunications markets in the world. The number of connections on the fixed network has grown by over 25 per cent. since 1984, and the volume of calls has increased by more than 60 per cent. in the same period. The growth in mobile services is even more spectacular, and there are now more than 1·1 million cellular radio subscribers. The United Kingdom equipment market has grown by over 60 per cent. since 1984, and the range of choice has increased substantially, and the United Kingdom has by far the largest value added services market in Europe.

2. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the Government's telecommunications policies.

Mr. Lilley: I set out the Government's proposals for liberalising the United Kingdom telecommunications market in my statement to the House on 5 March. My aim is to build on the policies of competition, choice and private enterprise that have been so successful, and to create the most open and dynamic telecommunications market in the world. The White Paper, "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s", is available in the Library for Members who may wish to study the proposals in more depth.

30. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect on consumer choice of the introduction of equal access, outlined in his Department's White Paper on telecommunications policy.

Mr. Lilley: The introduction of equal access will widen consumer choice substantially. It will make it simpler for consumers to select which operator carries their long-distance calls. They will be able to choose the operator providing the best or cheapest service.

Trade Statistics

20. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Australia and *(c)* South Africa last year; and what were the principal elements for each.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1990, the United Kingdom had a positive visible trade balance of £606·5 million with Australia and £34·9 million with South Africa accounted for mainly by machinery and transport equipment. The balance of trade deficit with Poland was £135·7 million, the main elements of which were iron and steel.

Domestic Products (Labelling)

21. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with trading standards officers about misleading labelling of domestic products.

Mr. Leigh: While I have not met trading standards officers specifically to discuss the subject of misleading labelling the question of environmental claims in respect of goods was raised as part of a general discussion I had with representatives of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration, when I met them on 20 February.

North Devon Manufacturers Association

22. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received any adverse comments about the work of the North Devon Manufacturers Association.

Mr. Lilley: On the contrary. I have heard nothing but good of its efforts to represent and support industry in the north Devon area throughout its 20 years of existence, and I wish it well in the future.

Exporters

23. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the categories of companies that have performed best in export markets over the last four years; and what assessments he has made of the reason for their success.

Mr. Sainsbury: The greatest success is achieved by companies that make a long-term commitment to export markets. We believe that the level and quality of management involvement is an important factor in success. Manufacturing exports increased by 70 per cent. in volume over the past 10 years.

Bulgaria

25. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the Bulgarian Ministers of Trade and Industry to discuss ways of increasing British assistance to Bulgaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Within the past few weeks I have met Mrs. Todorova and Mr. Daskalov, two of the three Bulgarian deputy Ministers of Foreign Economic Relations. The Government are providing assistance to Bulgaria through the IMF and the European Community and bilaterally via the know-how fund administered by my

right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. My Department will continue its efforts to stimulate trade and investment, supplemented by the support of the East European Trade Council whose chairman is visiting Bulgaria this week.

Consumer Affairs

26. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the local authorities trading standards officers to discuss consumer affairs.

Mr. Leigh: Although my right hon. Friend has not had any such meetings, I met representatives of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration last month to discuss consumer affairs.

Advice Agencies

27. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further assessment his Department has made of the implications of the poll tax on the workload of citizens advice bureaux and other advice-giving agencies.

Mr. Leigh: Citizens advice bureaux have had to deal with a number of inquiries arising from the introduction of the community charge, just as they used to on rates. The number of inquiries on the community charge rose in 1989-90 compared to 1988-89, but there was no significant change in the total number of inquiries dealt with by bureaux in 1989-90 compared to 1988-89. Figures relating to the current financial year are not yet available.

The Department of Environment has agreed to give the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux £36,000 this year to help with the costs of training bureaux workers to deal with these inquiries. The Scottish Office has also given Citizens Advice Scotland £36,000 over the last two years for the same purpose.

Inward Investment (USA)

28. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on inward investment from the United States of America.

Mr. Leigh: The United Kingdom continues to be the preferred location for United States investment in Europe. United States Department of Commerce figures show that at end 1989 Britain's share of United States direct investment into the European Community stood at 41 per cent., representing a stock figure of over £30 billion.

Kuwait

29. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's role in helping British firms to play a part in the reconstruction of Kuwait.

Mr. Lilley: The Kuwait reconstruction co-ordination team in my Department is working closely with industry to help develop links with the Kuwaiti authorities responsible for planning and implementing reconstruction and to disseminate information about opportunities. A number of DTI/industry sectoral groups have been set up for this purpose to cover the areas most relevant to Kuwait's likely requirements. A prospectus setting out the experience and capabilities of United Kingdom industry and listing more than 160 companies was presented to the Government of Kuwait by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 9 February. The DTI has also helped set up a small team of business representatives in Kuwait to promote British industry's interests, and one of my officials accompanied a group of senior business men on a visit to Kuwait on 10 and 11 March. A list is being compiled of companies which have expressed an interest in reconstruction work.

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the investment of United Kingdom firms in the reconstruction of Kuwait.

Mr. Lilley: Many British companies wish to take part in the reconstruction of Kuwait and have invested considerable time and resources in developing proposals and in responding to invitations to tender. The DTI is helping British firms to establish working relations with the Kuwaiti authorities which warmly welcome British interest in participating in the reconstruction process.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by when his Department hopes to have created a database of British companies interested in competing for contracts with the Government of Kuwait after the initial emergency programme; and if he will list the companies included, by category.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 14 March 1991]:* About 2,500 companies are now registered on the data base. My Department is still receiving many inquries from companies wishing to register their interests. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I cannot reveal their names.

Information Technology

31. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his most recent estimate of the balance of trade in information technology with Japan.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is no statistically recognised definition of information technology. However, divisions 75 and 76 of the standard international trade classification include information technology products and the estimated crude deficit in these divisions in 1990 was £1·8 billion. Our exports to Japan in these categories in 1990 increased in value by 17 per cent. over 1989.

Industrial Development (North of England)

32. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will visit the north of England to meet representatives of industry to discuss matters relating to his Department's activities in industrial development.

Mr. Leigh: During recent visits to the north of England, my colleagues and I have met a broad spectrum of local business leaders and discussed matters relating to industrial development. In the near future the Secretary of State will be meeting representatives of the Manchester financial and professional forum and the Tyne and Wear chamber of commerce. I have two planned visits to the north-east, where I have a particular interest in view of my position as godparent Minister for the region.

Eastern Europe

33. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prospects for trade with the countries of eastern Europe.

Mr. Sainsbury: The short-term prospects for trade with most of the countries of eastern Europe have worsened this year. However, the prospects of investment in and longer term trade with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, are continuing to improve as their governments press ahead with reform and establish a proper legal and fiscal framework for business.

Steel Industry

34. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Steel to discuss the future of the steel industry.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Steel whenever appropriate. Their last meeting was on 7 September, and there are no plans for a further meeting at this stage.

International Trade

36. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the development of simpler international trade procedures.

Mr. Sainsbury: The development of simpler international trade procedures is largely the responsibility of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board—SITPRO—a non-departmental public body supported by the Department. SITPRO's central aims are the development of international standards for electronic data interchange where it has made a particularly significant contribution to what has become known as UN/EDIFACT—United Nations electronic data interchange for administration, commerce and transport. Secondly, they work for elimination of procedural barriers to trade with particular reference to measures associated with the creation of the single European market.

Production Statistics

37. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase/decrease in the production of the principal import competing and exporting industries between 1973 and 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is no officially recognised definition of "principal import competing and exporting industries".

Imports and Exports

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will show the crude balance of imports and exports of *(a)* cereals and cereal preparations, *(b)* motor vehicles and *(c)* electrical goods in 1979, 1984 and 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information requested is in the table.

United Kingdom visible crude trade balances

£ million[2]

Division of SITC[1]	*1979*	*1984*	*1989*
04 Cereals and cereal preparations	−404·0	363·7	229·4
77 Electrical machinery etc.	46·9	−1,041·4	−1,630·4
78 Road vehicles	−795·1	−2,638·8	−6,932·2

[1] Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), 1979 and 1984 = Revision 2; 1989 = Revision 3.
[2] At current prices.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports in 1980, 1985 and 1990 at current prices of (i) cereals, (ii) all agricultural products, (iii) motor vehicles, (iv) coal, (v) steel and (vi) electrical goods; and if he will show the net increase or decrease since 1980 in money and percentage terms.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information available is shown in the tables.

Table 1—United Kingdom visible imports

£ million[1]

Section/Division of SITC[2]	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*	*1990 less 1980*	*Net change since 1980 (per cent.)*
0 Agricultural products[3]	5,478	8,107	10,409	4,931	90
of which					
04 Cereals[4]	603	713	785	182	30
32 Coal, coke and briquettes	239	740	655	416	174
67 Iron and steel	1,448	1,716	2,677	1,229	85
77 Electrical machinery etc.	1,519	4,277	6,924	5,406	356
78 Road vehicles	3,352	6,801	12,587	9,235	276

Table 2—United Kingdom visible exports

£ million[1]

Section/Division of SITC[2]		1980	1985	1990	1990 less 1980	Net change since 1980 (per cent.)
0	Agricultural products[3]	2,051	3,252	4,325	2,274	111
	of which					
04	Cereals[4]	456	833	1,046	590	129
32	Coal, coke and briquettes	180	179	122	−58	−32
67	Iron and steel	983	1,856	3,036	2,053	209
77	Electrical machinery etc.	1,799	3,380	5,649	3,850	214
78	Road vehicles	3,158	3,911	7,301	4,143	131

[1] At current prices.
[2] Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), 1980 and 1985 = Revision 2; 1990 = Revision 3.
[3] Section 0 of the SITC is defined as Food and Live Animals. A definition of Agricultural Products does not exist in the SITC.
[4] Cereals and cereal preparations.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give comparative figures in money and percentage terms in exports of *(a)* cereals and *(b)* all agricultural products and the percentage change in the remainder of British exports, broken down also into its principal sections between 1980 and 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information available is shown in the table.

Table—United Kingdom Visible Exports 1980 and 1990

Section/Division of SITC (1)	1980 £ million	Per cent. of total trade	1990 £ million	Per cent. of total trade	1980-90 per cent.
0 Agricultural products (2)	2,051	4·3	4,325	4·2	110·9
of which:					
04 Cereals (3)	456	1·0	1,046	1·0	129·4
1 Beverages and tobacco	1,206	2·5	2,770	2·7	129·7
2 Inedible crude materials, except fuels	1,379	2·9	2,163	2·1	56·9
3 Mineral fuels, lubricants	6,429	13·6	7,801	7·5	21·4
4 Animal and vegetable oils etc.	71	0·1	88	0·1	23·5
5 Chemicals and related	5,286	11·2	13,183	12·7	149·4
6 Manufactured goods classified chiefly by material	8,754	18·5	15,821	15·2	80·7
7 Machinery and transport equipment	16,267	34·3	42,155	40·6	159·1
8 Miscellaneous manufactured articles	4,504	9·5	13,347	12·8	196·4
9 Other visible trade	1,411	3·0	2,559	2·5	81·3
Total United Kingdom visible exports	47,364	100·0	103,911	100·0	119·4
Total less agricultural products (2)	45,313	95·7	99,586	95·8	119·8

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom
(1) Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), 1980 = Revision 2; 1990 = Revision 3.
(2) Section 0 of the SITC is defined as Food & Live Animals. A definition of agricultural products does not exist in the SITC.
(3) Cereals and cereal preparations.

Shipbuilding

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the work of the shipbuilding task force within his Department.

Mr. Leigh: The objective of the shipbuilding task force is to reduce state involvement in the shipbuilding industry, working for the elimination of production and development aids internationally while encouraging United Kingdom shipbuilders and marine equipment manufacturers to operate competitively in international markets and in the defence sector.

To that end, the task force is resolving any remaining problems arising from the disposal of British Shipbuilders; managing expenditure on the home shipbuilders credit guarantee scheme and the shipbuilding intervention fund; ensuring that the European Community seventh directive on aid to shipbuilding is operated in line with Ministers' objectives; attempting to ensure further progress in the European Community and the OECD in negotiating an agreement to end state aids for shipbuilding worldwide; and maintaining appropriate liaison with the Ministry of Defence on the future naval shipbuilding programme and on projects likely to affect shipyard capacity utilisation.

Inward Investment

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the percentage of United Kingdom inward investment projects going to *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the north-east, both as a percentage of total projects and in terms of numbers of jobs promised in the periods (i) June 1987 to the most recently available date and (ii) January 1989 to the most recently available date.

Mr. Leigh: The table sets out the number of investment decisions known to the Invest in Britain Bureau from 1 July 1987 to 31 December 1990 and from 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1990 for Scotland, Wales and the north-east. The numbers of jobs expected to be created from such projects and the percentage share of both projects and jobs as part of the total for the United Kingdom as a whole is also given.

The decisions recorded include the establishment of new business, expansion or acquisition of an existing business and involvement in joint venture. The figures are based on information provided by the companies themselves at the time of the investment and take no account of subsequent developments.

Table showing numbers of inward investment projects and associated created jobs for certain regions over specified time periods, and their respective percentage share of the overall inward investment figures for the United Kingdom

Region	Number of projects	Percentage of all United Kingdom projects	Number of jobs created[3]	Percentage of jobs created
Scotland				
1987-90[1]	151	12·9	22,484	22·9
1989-90[2]	73	10·8	14,298	24·8
Wales				
1987-90[1]	192	16·4	14,114	14·4
1989-90[2]	114	16·9	6,330	11·0
North East				
1987-90[1]	120	10·2	11,320	11·5
1989-90[2]	88	13·0	7,049	12·2

[1] 1 July 1987 to 31 December 1990.
[2] 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1990.
[3] Created jobs are those jobs that the inward investor anticipates will be created by the project over the next three years.

Bloodstock Sales

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the total worth of overseas earnings from the sale of bloodstock in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Statistics in this area are not separately identified in "Overseas Trade Statistics"—standard international trade classification division 00.

RECHAR

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from organisations seeking full additionality within the regions for the RECHAR programme.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* My right hon. Friends and I have received a number of representations from Members of Parliament, local authorities and the Coalfield Communities Campaign on various aspects of the proposed RECHAR programmes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what allocations of RECHAR funds to the United Kingdom have been withheld by the Community on grounds of lack of additionality.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* European Commission decisions are awaited on applications made in July 1990 for RECHAR grants of £109 million from European Community funds to United Kingdom coalfield areas. As is usual with applications for grants from the European Community structural funds, discussions with the Commission are proceeding on various aspects of them.

Structural Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a breakdown of the claims made, by year from 1987, for each EC structural fund operational programme area, compared with the allocation awarded to each programme within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Fifty current operational programmes have to date been approved by the Commission for the United Kingdom. Details of the claims made for each of these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that EC structural fund support for the regions of the EC has an additional economic impact in those regions;

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that local authority spending of EC structural funds is exempt from current United Kingdom capital and revenue controls to ensure that there is a net benefit to regions with severe economic structural problems in receiving EC support.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Expected levels of receipts from the European Community structural funds, as of other receipts from the Community, are taken into account when the Government decide the size of United Kingdom public expenditure programmes. Structural fund grants to local authorities are paid in full to the authorities concerned.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a detailed breakdown of how much of the EC structural fund support designated for programmes to take place in the eligible United Kingdom regions has been spent on United Kingdom Government Department schemes of assistance.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* The Community support frameworks agreed between the Government and the European Commission do not in general specify in detail the Departments and other authorities whose measures the European Community structural funds will support. Until each operational programme has been concluded it is not possible to say how the expenditure from it has been allocated.

Regional Policy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to review the effectiveness of United Kingdom regional policy.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* My Department has an on-going programme for reviewing all schemes of support to industry, including regional policy instruments. A second-stage evaluation of regional enterprise grants was published earlier this month by HMSO, and a report on the evaluation of regional selective assistance covering the period 1980 to 1984 was published last year.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies employed on behalf of his Department to give advice, or to undertake other work on public relations and similar matters, during the Gulf crisis; if he will indicate the amount of money spent on remuneration for the companies involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The only companies employed by the Ministry of Defence on work on public relations and similar matters during the Gulf crisis have been employed to provide administrative support services, such as transcription services and provision of press cuttings. Principal among these companies have been the Broadcast Monitoring Company and Lincoln Hannah Ltd.

Details of payments to individual companies are generally a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any employees of British defence companies were sent to the Gulf region to provide assistance to the armed forces as part of Operation Granby.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate number of *(a)* combat and *(b)* non-combat sorties carried out by the Royal Air Force as a part of Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The RAF flew over 4,000 combat and 2,500 non-combat sorties from the commencement of the air campaign until the cessation of hostilities. Some 9,000 sorties were also flown in support of Operation Granby prior to 17 January 1991, 8,000 by combat aircraft and 1,000 by non-combat aircraft.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the role of British industry in supporting Operation Granby.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom defence industry responded admirably to our requirements during all stages of Operation Granby.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of *(a)* British and *(b)* coalition casualities involved in Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement detailing the numbers killed or wounded and whether these casualties resulted from combat or non-combat operations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Twenty-five service men are confirmed to have been killed and 43 injured in action. A further 19 have been killed in non-combat accidents in the Gulf since 2 August 1990. Her Majesty's Government are not in a position to provide information on casualties sustained by coalition partners.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate amount and type of ordnance delivered by the Royal Air Force as part of Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The RAF delivered over 3,000 tonnes of ordnance during the air campaign in support of operations in the Gulf. This total comprised over 100 JP233 airfield denial weapons, some 6,000 bombs, of which over 1,000 were laser-guided, over 100 anti-radar missiles and nearly 700 air-to-ground rockets.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's assessment of the number of Kuwaiti civilians seized and taken to Iraq between 2 August 1990 and the cessation of hostilities;

(2) what is his Department's assessment of the number of Kuwaitis seized by the Iraqi forces between 2 August 1990 and the cessation of hostilities that are still unaccounted for.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

We understand that the total number of missing Kuwaitis is estimated at 33,000. This is made up of 6,000 prisoners of war, 5,000 Kuwaitis who are known to have been taken to Iraq, and 22,000 whose fate is still unknown. The Kuwaiti authorities have established registration centres to enable Kuwaiti families to give details of missing persons.

Site Security

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of security at the sites of his Department's main contractors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what level of security at the sites of his Department's main contractors, relative to that of his Department's sites, his Department requires; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At defence contractors' sites the level of security required by the Ministry of Defence depends on the nature and classification of the contracts. Where appropriate, the MOD satisfied itself that its security requirements are met before work begins on the contract. Thereafter such contractors' sites are inspected regularly, the continuing adequacy of security arrangements is assessed and, where necessary, improvements are made.

The MOD is directly responsible for all aspects of security at all its own establishments. These establishments are inspected regularly, security arrangements are assessed and, where necessary, improvements are made.

Europe

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has been involved with regarding military confidence-building measures in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The continuing negotiations on confidence and security-building measures in Europe resumed in Vienna on 4 February. The Ministry of Defence is fully involved in these negotiations, although the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is the lead Department on these and other arms control matters.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 March 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for each local authority the level of rates payable in 1989-90 below which a ratepaying couple who have not subsequently moved house might expect in 1991-92 to benefit from the community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for a table of the information requested, based on the community charges for 1991-92 so far reported to the Department, to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91, for each local authority in England and Wales, the proportion of revenue raised by the rating system or community charge as a percentage of total local authority expenditure.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for a table of the estimates for local authorities in England for 1988-89 and 1989-90 to be placed in the Library of the House. For 1990-91, community charge income is paid into the collection fund of the charging authority and, together with revenue support grant and receipts from the non-domestic rates pool, finances the spending of both charging and precepting authorities. It is not therefore possible to relate the community charge income of the collection fund to the expenditure of any particular authority.

Figures for authorities in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the year on year increase in percentage terms, in standard spending assessment for 1991-92 for each metropolitan district and London borough.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* The figures requested are given in the following table:

Percentage increase in SSA between 1990-91 and 1991-92

	per cent.
Greater London	
City of London	2·5
Camden	22·4
Greenwich	22·2
Hackney	22·9
Hammersmith and Fulham	20·8
Islington	25·4
Kensington and Chelsea	26·8
Lambeth	23·3
Lewisham	24·1
Southwark	24·7
Tower Hamlets	25·1
Wandsworth	23·2
Westminster	22·1
Barking and Dagenham	20·6
Barnet	22·9
Bexley	21·3
Brent	19·9
Bromley	21·9
Croydon	20·7
Ealing	21·7
Enfield	22·1
Haringey	21·7
Harrow	18·9
Havering	20·3
Hillingdon	23·5
Hounslow	23·9
Kingston upon Thames	21·6
Merton	17·2
Newham	23·7
Redbridge	22·6
Richmond upon Thames	22·1
Sutton	21·9
Waltham Forest	20·8
Greater Manchester	
Bolton	17·9
Bury	17·9
Manchester	19·5
Oldham	21·6
Rochdale	19·5
Salford	16·3
Stockport	19·2
Tameside	18·5
Trafford	16·6
Wigan	18·6
Merseyside	
Knowsley	16·0
Liverpool	18·1
St. Helens	20·2
Sefton	20·5
Wirral	19·2
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	19·9
Doncaster	20·5
Rotherham	18·8
Sheffield	20·2
Tyne and Wear	
Gateshead	20·4
Newcastle upon Tyne	18·8
North Tyneside	19·5
South Tyneside	18·2
Sunderland	19·5
West Midlands	
Birmingham	18·4
Coventry	17·0
Dudley	19·5
Sandwell	17·1
Solihull	17·9
Walsall	15·9
Wolverhampton	18·4
West Yorkshire	
Bradford	19·7
Calderdale	18·0
Kirklees	18·8
Leeds	20·5
Wakefield	19·4

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what would be the level of community charge in Kent for 1990-91 if the amount of revenue support grant, or its equivalent, paid to local authorities had been maintained at its 1978-79 level in real terms;

(2) what would be the level of community charge in Calderdale for 1990-91 if the amount of revenue support grant, or its equivalent, paid to local authorities had been maintained at its 1978-79 level in real terms.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) on Thursday 14 March, *Official Report*, column 670.

Council Housing

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish, in the *Official Report* *(a)* the total, for each authority, of homes owned by the council at 1 January 1980, *(b)* the total sold to tenants under the right-to-buy legislation and other voluntary processes since 1 January 1980 to the latest date for which figures are available and *(c)* the percentage *(b)* represents of *(a)* for the London boroughs of Camden, Islington, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, the metropolitan boroughs of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham and the districts of Nottingham and Bristol, and each of the districts of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.

Mr. Yeo: A table giving the available information on sales for each English local authority was placed in the Library on Wednesday 30 January 1991—*Official Report*, column *542*.

Homelessness

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of people made homeless due to mortgage repossessions since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 where the main immediate reason for homelessness is mortgage arrears, but do not distinguish those who were actually subject to repossession. Estimates are as follows:

Year	*England*
1979	2,000
1980	2,500
1981	3,500
1982	4,200
1983	4,700
1984	6,100
1985	8,300
1986	10,070
1987	10,460
1988	8,340
1989	8,360
1990	13,470

Urban Renewal Grant

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the range of projects funded by urban renewal grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Key: In addition to the resources made available through local authorities' housing investment programme allocations and capital receipts, my Department provides specific resources under the group of urban and housing programmes as follows:

	1990-91 £ million
Urban programme	232·6
City grant approved	49·5
Derelict land grant	73·5
Urban development corporations	553·9
City action teams	7·8
Estate action	190·0

In addition, resources totalling £165 million are available in 1990-91 to help the homeless through local authority and housing association schemes, the rough sleepers initiative and grants to voluntary organisations offering advice and support.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what projects in Wandsworth have received funding from the urban renewal grant; and what is the total value of the grants.

Mr. Key: My Department has provided specific resources in Wandsworth as follows:

	1990-91 £ million
Urban programme	2·5
City grant approved	0·4
Homelessness	3·1

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what payments will be made or have been made to Mr. D. A. Turnbull arising out of the sale of TCS to the management buy-out with which the person to whom the Government are considering selling the transport section of the Crown Suppliers is connected.

Mr. Yeo: Payments totalling £36,000 have been made by my Department to members of Mr. Pinkney's team in support of fees they incurred up to December 1990 for advice from D. A. Turnbull and Co. Mr. Turnbull is corresponding with the Department about support for subsequent fees for the team's advisers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether all TCS contracts let by his Department connected in any way with Mr. D. A. Turnbull complied with civil service procurement rules.

Mr. Yeo: Yes.

Housing Associations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on funding lesbian and gay housing associations.

Mr. Yeo: To be eligible for public funding for housing activities, a housing association must be registered with the Housing Corporation. Responsibility for registration rests in statute with the corporation. I am, however, not aware that there are any registered associations which meet the hon. Member's description.

Derelict Land, Leicestershire

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent in Government grants on derelict land, following the closure of coal mines, in north-west Leicestershire since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: Since 1979, payments of derelict land grant totalling £2,496,884 have been authorised for schemes for the reclamation of former collieries in Leicestershire, North-West.

Gulf Oil Fires

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the evidence on which he has based his statement, *Official Report*, 15 March, column 1389, on the impact of oil fires.

Mr. Baldry: The long-term environmental damage arising from acid rain in parts of Europe results from cumulative deposition over very many years, combined with sensitive geology. Neither of these factors applies in the Gulf region, and it is therefore to be hoped that long-term damage will be slight.

Water Supply

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many relaxations have been authorised under the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 12 March, *Official Report*, column *476*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are *(a)* the average cost per person of Government provision towards local government services and *(b)* individual community charges in each district in Devon in 1991-92;

(2) what is the support per person given by central Government to *(a)* Lambeth and *(b)* North Devon; and what is the community charge of each for the year 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The available information is given in the table. If Parliament enacts the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, new average community charges will be £140 lower, with a consequent increase in central Government support.

	Total external support[1] *1991-92 £/head*	*Average community charge 1991-92 £/head*
East Devon	456	383
Exeter	491	377
Mid Devon	472	394
North Devon	479	[2]—
Plymouth	510	380
South Hams	465	380
Teignbridge	466	405
Torbay	475	380
Torridge	514	346
West Devon	468	370
Lambeth	1,557	590

[1] Total external support includes revenue support grant, receipts from the non-domestic rates pool, area protection grant and Inner London education grant. Information on other central Government support (specific grants, community charge reduction scheme, and community charge benefits) will not be available until authorities send in their detailed budget returns to the Department.

[2] Not available.

Research

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of research projects *(a)* currently being undertaken or *(b)* commissioned by his Department; and if he will list the subjects of research and dates for publication in each case.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department is currently managing just over 1,000 research contracts on environmental protection, planning, local government, housing and construction. These contracts are expected to produce a corresponding number of reports over the next two years. It would not be practicable to list the expected publication date of each.

Transport Museum, Bradford

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the negotiations regarding the city grant application to assist the development of the transport museum site at Low Moor, Bradford.

Mr. Key: There is as yet no city grant application for the Low Moor site. However, a proposal for a mixed leisure and commercial development on this site has been submitted to the Department for a preliminary view on its suitability for city grant. The proposal is currently under discussion between the Department's city grant team and the scheme's promoters.

Milton Keynes Development Corporation

Mr. Benyon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the wind-up of the Milton Keynes development corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Following careful consideraiton of the representations received in the course of our consultation under section 41 of the New Towns Act 1981, I have decided that Milton Keynes development corporation should be wound up on the target date of 31 March 1992. The necessary order will be made in due course.

It is important that Milton Keynes be brought to completion to the high standards established by the development corporation and that inward investment and promotion of the city continue. The Commission for the New Towns has much experience in handling the completion of development, and I am confident that it has the flexibility to meet the particular and acknowledged needs of Milton Keynes. I am asking the commission to pay special attention to balanced development to continuing high standards at Milton Keynes and to inward investment there. I am also asking the commission to move towards the establishment there of a new promotion agency, in conjunction with the local authorities and the private sector. This agency will have a dedicated budget.

Urban Renewal Grants

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the range of projects funded by urban renewal grants in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox).

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what projects in Salford have received funding from the urban renewal grant; and what is the total value of the grants.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* My Department has provided specific resources in Salford as follows:

	1990-91 £ million
Urban programme	6·9
City grant approved	5·3
Derelict land grant	1·8
Manchester/Salford city action team	0·9
Estate action	3·7

In addition, the designated areas of Trafford Park development corporation covers a small area of Salford borough; the development corporation's total provision in 1990-91 is £24·2 million.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the capital debt for each local authority *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* five years previously and the amount of interest paid in the intervening period; and if he will total the figures regionally and nationally.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 19 March 1991]:* The available information has today been placed in the Library of the House.

Standard Community Charges

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, columns *478-79*, relating to standard poll tax payers; if he will now give the comparable figures for Bolton; and how many standard charges are attributed to second homes in *(a)* Wigan, *(b)* Salford, *(c)* Westminster and *(d)* Bolton.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* Bolton's return to my Department gives the number of properties subject to a standard community charge at 1 June 1990 to be "not available". In any case, no information can be provided in the terms sought. The fact that a property may give rise to the standard charge does not indicate whether it is kept as a second home or is empty for some other reason.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the additional costs grant arising from the abolition of ILEA to each of the London local authorities *(a)* in 1990-91 and *(b)* for 1991-92.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* The amounts payable by way of inner London education grants are as follows:

	1990-91 £	*1991-92 £*
City of London	210,000	147,000
Camden	6,781,169	4,792,075
Greenwich	11,344,514	7,852,451
Hackney	6,523,011	4,872,854
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,812,046	4,951,567
Islington	7,840,576	5,342,227
Kensington and Chelsea	3,693,725	2,416,962
Lambeth	9,475,207	6,691,718
Lewisham	10,565,150	7,375,779
Southwark	9,479,967	6,469,667
Tower Hamlets	9,102,152	5,910,136
Wandsworth	10,974,086	7,970,026
Westminster	7,198,397	5,207,538

Dumplington

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he gives to local authorities as regards an acceptable time scale for the determination of a planning application; what target time scale he sets for determination of planning issues within his Department; what is the average length of time taken by his Department to arrive at a decision on such applications following the completion of a public inquiry; and why it has now taken more than three years in the case of the application for a regional shopping centre at Dumplington, Trafford Park, Manchester.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have set local authorities the target of deciding 80 per cent. of planning applications within eight weeks.

The Department has a target of determining 80 per cent. of those planning applications which are called in for the Secretary of State's decision within 13 weeks from the date on which the inspector's report is received. The target for planning appeals which are recovered for the Secretary of State's decision, rather than being transferred to a planning inspector for decision, is to determine 80 per cent. within eight weeks of receiving the inspector's report. Of cases decided in 1990, 64 per cent. of called-in applications were decided within 13 weeks; 59 per cent. of recovered appeals were decided within eight weeks.

Occasionally, decisions take substantially longer because the scale or nature of the proposed development raises complex issues. I understand the frustration caused by the long delay in issuing the decision on two called-in applications and an appeal relating to the Dumplington scheme. This has been caused by the need to consider carefully the comments made by the parties about the access proposals. As I said in reply to my hon. Friend on 11 February, I cannot yet forecast when it will be possible to decide these cases. I will write to interested parties as soon as I can.

Litter, Motorways

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answer of 13 March, if he will list the starting and completion dates of litter collection from each section of motorway for the last year for which figures are available; if he will take steps to ensure that

embankments and verges are cleared; and whether any prosecutions for littering of motorways have been successful.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

Litter collection from motorways is undertaken by the Department's agents in conjunction with other highway maintenance functions. Separate information about starting and finishing dates for litter collection is not available.

The provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which will come into force on 1 April this year, will require litter clearance to specified standards from highways including embankments and verges.

Records of successful prosecutions for littering do not distinguish motorways from other areas. In 1988, there were 1,607 convictions for littering under the Litter Act 1983, and in 1989 there were 2,174.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Safety

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to review the legislation relating to corporate responsibility, liability and accountability for public safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department keeps under review any issues which may affect the safety of consumers and the responsibility of suppliers of consumer products to ensure that their products are reasonably safe. The relevant legislation is the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and I have no immediate plans to undertake a review of the Act.

Profit Sharing

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new incentives for profit sharing his Department plans to offer to British companies.

Mr. Redwood: A number of tax incentives are operated by the Inland Revenue. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a number of improvements to them in his Budget statement, including profit-related pay, save-as-you-earn, employee share ownership trusts and personal equity plans.

WALES

Steel Industry

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total job losses in the steel industry in Wales in each financial year since 1978-79.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information detailing separately the number of jobs lost or created in the steel industry is not available. The following table shows the number of persons employed in the steel industry in Wales at the end of December each year.

	Number of employees
1978	56,900
1979	55,300
1980	34,700
1981	27,100
1982	24,600
1983	22,300
1984	21,800
1985	21,500
1986	21,100
1987	20,900
1988	20,200
1989	19,400
1990	[1]18,000

[1] Provisional.

Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether, following the recent determination on appeal that speech therapy should be regarded as an educational provision for certain children, he has given any guidance to local education authorities in Wales on the implementation of the Education Act 1981 and the provision of statements of special educational needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Welsh Office circular 54/89 on "Assessments and Statements of Special Educational Needs" gives guidance to local education authorities on the implementation of the Education Act 1981 and the provision of statements. It also advises on the need for local education authorities to work closely with district health authorities and social services departments on the provision of non-educational services.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes concerning fallen animals: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: As I indicated to the hon. Gentleman when I wrote to him on 18 February 1991, the difficulties being experienced in respect of the disposal of fallen animals arise primarily from changes in the market for rendered products. In the Government's view, this is largely a problem for the market to resolve. Nevertheless, the state veterinary service continues to monitor the situation. It, with the National Rivers Authority and local authorities, can provide advice to farmers about the disposal of fallen animals. Research which could lead to an improvement in the market for rendered products continues, and the recycling of animal waste has been identified as a priority area for EC assistance under regulation 866/90.

Open-heart Surgery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the number of open-heart surgery operations carried out at the University hospital of Wales to reach *(a)* 650, *(b)* 700, *(c)* 750 and *(d)* 800.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: An increase in the number of open-heart operations for adults at the University hospital of Wales to the target of 800 yearly is presently under consideration with South Glamorgan health authority, reflecting the substantial central investment to upgrade coronary and intensive care facilities and cardiac catheter laboratories at the hospital and projected achievements in 1990-91.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the numbers of open-heart surgery operations carried out in Wales in 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information for 1970 and 1975 is not readily available or directly comparable. From information provided by health authorities I understand that, in addition to 129 open-heart operations secured for patients from Wales under contractual arrangements with hospitals in England during 1990 and funded centrally by the Welsh Office, the number of open-heart operations reported to have been carried out in Wales is:

	Number
1980	244
1985	576
1990	637

Farm Aid Conservation Grants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many grant applications under the farm aid conservation grant scheme have been refused in the last two years; and if he will list the numbers refused under each main ground for refusal.

Mr. David Hunt: In Wales, since the farm and conservation grant scheme was introduced in February 1989, a total of 134 claims have been rejected and 2,099 claims authorised for payment up to the end of February 1991. Claims will have been rejected for a breach of either the statutory requirements or the administrative rules of the scheme. I understand that the vast majority have been rejected for breaching statutory requirements.

Minister's Flat, Cathays Park

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 18 March, column *34*, whether he took account of the country of origin, when purchasing the bed linen, microwave oven, television set and video recorder for the Secretary of State's flat at the Crown buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Mr. David Hunt: These were purchases made locally seeking value for money. Most of the items were manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether, pursuant to his answers of 18 March, column *34*, standard community charge is payable to Cardiff city council in the respect of the Secretary of State's flat at the Crown buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Mr. David Hunt: Community charge payments are not appropriate as the flat forms part of the non-domestic value of the Cathays Park building. However, contributions are made through non-domestic rate support.

Artificial Joints

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current cost of a replacement *(a)* knee and *(b)* hip operation carried out under specific earmarked Welsh Office contract funds at the treatment centre at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Current costs at the treatment centre, including all fixed and variable costs, are £2,463 for a hip replacement and £3,163 for a knee replacement.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the numbers of adults in Wales waiting for replacement (i) hips and (ii) knees for periods of more than four months *(a)* in the last full year before the setting-up of the treatment centre at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar and *(b)* the present year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is not collected in the form requested, although it was estimated, at July 1989, that some 935 patients were waiting four months or more for hip and knee replacement operations.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the length of the four months plus waiting list for artificial *(a)* knees and *(b)* hips for the year 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not collected in the form requested.

Pollution Control

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that in the case of pollution control projects, grant aid approval will not be refused to farmers who have set about urgent remedial works, eligible for grant, in response to requests from the National Rivers Authority or any other regulatory body.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It has always been our policy to pay grant on claims which comply with the terms of the relevant grant scheme.

Aston Day Centre

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure the continued running of the Deeside day centre at Aston.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for the local statutory agencies concerned to decide whether or not they wish to provide funds for the centre.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to announce the future arrangements for allocating revenue funds to district health authorities in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Health authorities were consulted in January on options for a weighted capitation formula to be used to determine each authority's share of revenue resources. Copies of the consultation paper "Implementing the White Paper: Options for a Weighted Capitation Revenue Resource Allocation Formula" are in the Library of the House.

After considering the responses from authorities, I have decided that the most appropriate basis for the formula is as set out in option 4 of the consultation paper. This option takes account of the review of the relationships between morbidity, social deprivation and health needs carried out for the Department by Dr. Carr-Hill of York university. Copies of his review were circulated with the consultation document and are in the Library of the House. I shall also be arranging for it to be published. The formula retains the weighting for sparsity included in the existing revenue assessment formula. This is in recognition of the additional costs of providing services to scattered populations in rural areas.

Each DHA's share of resources, according to the formula, compared with its share of gross discretionary recurrent revenue resources for 1991-92, is shown in the table:

	Percentage share of revenue funding	
	1991-92	Formula share
Clwyd	13·52	14·24
East Dyfed	9·02	8·77
Gwent	14·87	15·20
Gwynedd	8·18	8·78
Mid Glamorgan	19·14	19·05
Pembrokeshire	3·68	3·87
Powys	4·76	4·15
South Glamorgan	14·00	13·09
West Glamorgan	12·83	12·86

Health authorities will need time to adjust to their new formula shares and there is also some uncertainty about the effect of revised population estimates following the 1991 census on formula shares. For these reasons the allocations of most authorities will, subject to any centrally funded service developments, be maintained at their current level, after allowing for inflation, until 1993-94; and only those shown to be more than 2 per cent. below their formula target level of funding will benefit from discretionary growth funding. From 1994-95 to 1998-99, I presently intend that district health authorities' allocations will be adjusted in equal steps, so that each authority will receive its formula share of funds by 1998-99. The need for a faster or slower pace of change than this will be reconsidered in 1993 when the 1993-94 allocations are announced. Factors that I will take into account will be the effects of revised population estimates and the extent to which equalisation will have been achieved as a result of the differential distribution of growth funding in 1992-93 and 1993-94.

On this basis and, I must stress, for planning purposes only, the percentage changes in discretionary funding that authorities might anticipate over the next 10 years are as follows:

Annual change in revenue resources as a percentage of previous year's allocation at constant prices

	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	Year 2000-01
Clwyd	1·28	1·25	1·17	1·17	1·17	1·17	1·16	0·45	0·45
East Dyfed	0·00	0·00	0·05	0·05	0·05	0·05	0·05	0·45	0·45
Gwent	0·53	0·59	0·84	0·84	0·84	0·84	0·84	0·45	0·45
Gwynedd	1·76	1·67	1·39	1·38	1·38	1·37	1·36	0·45	0·45
Mid Glamorgan	0·00	0·00	0·52	0·52	0·53	0·53	0·53	0·45	0·45
Pembroke	1·20	1·18	1·14	1·14	1·14	1·13	1·13	0·45	0·45
Powys	0·00	0·00	−1·97	−2·02	−2·08	−2·14	−2·21	0·45	0·45
South Glamorgan	0·00	0·00	−0·70	−0·71	−0·72	−0·73	−0·75	0·45	0·45
West Glamorgan	0·00	0·00	0·66	0·66	0·66	0·67	0·67	0·45	0·45

This assumes 0·5 per cent. per annum real terms growth in overall discretionary revenue provision, exclusive of capital charges element, in line with resource planning assumptions previously issued to DHAs. However, resultant figures above are expressed as a percentage of total revenue allocations—with capital charges element added back in.

The table shows that there will be a redistribution of resources with the allocations of two authorities, Powys and South Glamorgan, being reduced to their capitation shares after 1993-94, subject to the review in 1993. The changes affect the purchasing positions of health authorities, but the provision of services will depend on where purchasers choose to place their contracts. The future of individual hospitals will therefore not always depend on the relative funding position of the authorities in which they are located.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the social fund allocations for 1991-92 to each of his offices in Glasgow.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 19 March, *Official Report*, column *68*.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to his reply of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *170-71*, he will provide a breakdown of the figures for the cost of incentives in the years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 between people opting into *(a)* personal pensions or *(b)* schemes, giving the numbers involved in each case.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government Actuary's estimates are as follows:

	Great Britain			
Year	Incentives to personal pensions	Schemes	Number eligible for incentive in personal pensions	Schemes
		£ billion		million
1987-88	0·3	—	3·1	—
1988-89	0·35	0·06	3·1	0·5
1989-90	0·5	0·1	4·0	0·75

The amounts paid are shown against the year to which they relate rather than the year in which payment was made.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what it would cost to raise the state pension of *(a)* a single person to £60 per week and *(b)* a married couple to £96 per week; and by how much the basic rate of income tax would have to rise to produce the sums required.

Miss Widdecombe: It would cost an extra £3·6 billion to increase the basic state retirement pension from the

1991-92 levels to those suggested. State retirement pensions are paid from the national insurance fund and not by general taxation, so a rise in these pensions of this amount would imply an increase in national insurance contributions of £2·50 per week for an employee on average male earnings and the same amount for his employer.

Claimants (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* supplementary benefit, *(b)* supplementary pension and *(c)* income support there were in each constituency of the county of Tyne and Wear in May 1979 and at present.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. However, it is possible to identify the number of claimants in the categories above in the three local offices serving the Tyne and Wear area:

	[1]1979	[2]1991
(a) Supplementary Benefit[3]	27,910	[4]—
(b) Supplementary Pension	14,910	[4]—
(c) Income Support	[4]—	39,620

[1] Data derived from Quarterly Statistical Enquiry of 15 May 1979.
[2] Data derived from 28 February 1991 count of cases in action, which include a number where payment has ceased but other action is continuing. Data is provisional and subject to amendment.
[3] Includes Supplementary Pension cases quoted at line *(b)*.
[4] Not applicable.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will consider proposing to power companies the joint publicising of the cold weather payment scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 14 March, *Official Report*, columns *669-70*.

Crisis Loans, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions have been issued to local offices in Bradford regarding the consideration of applications for crisis loans from young single people; if he will ensure that such applications are dealt with immediately; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The guidance issued by the Secretary of State about considering applications for crisis loans is published in the social fund manual, a copy of which is in the Library.

Local guidance concerning priorities to be met from the local loans budgets makes no differentiation between ages of applicants. In making decisions, social fund officers take into account the law, the Secretary of State's directions and guidance, and local managers' guidance on priorities, in the light of the individual applicant's needs and circumstances.

Applications satisfying the criteria for crisis loans are cleared on the day of receipt.

SCOTLAND

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Ian Lang: My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), the Under-Secretary of State responsible for industry and local government in the Scottish Office, is also responsible for matters concerning energy. As regards energy efficiency, his brief is the same as that of the other members of the ministerial group on energy efficiency which was announced in the White Paper on the Environment on 25 September. The group is chaired by the Secretary of State for Energy. Its aim is to raise the profile of energy efficiency by working with Government Departments, local authorities and organisations representing energy users in all sectors of the economy to stimulate improvements. The group will also monitor the Government's energy efficiency programmes and the new initiatives announced in the White Paper on the environment and assess the need for further action.

Nursery Schools

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which regions the urban programme has funded nursery schools; and if he will list each approved project with the cost and number of places.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The urban programme funds a wide variety of projects aimed at pre-school children and their families in the most deprived urban areas in Scotland. The table lists projects which have been funded since 1979 where the urban programme has specifically provided nursery school places.

Region and Project Title	*Approved Cost*[1]		*Number of Places*	
	Capital	*Current*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Strathclyde				
Pre-School and Parent Provision, Fullarton, Irvine	8,800	18,480	—	20
Pre-Fives Brachead Primary School, Irvine	3,200	10,550	—	30
Pre-Five and Parent Provision, Irvine	3,328	10,340	—	40
Pre-Five and Parent Provision, Stanley Primary School, Ardrossan	8,490	22,340	—	30
Haycocks Primary School Nursery Class, Stevenson, Ayr	4,700	19,067	—	60
Three Towns Pre-Five Project (Saltcoats)	189,892	288,782	55	10

Region and Project Title	Approved Cost[1] Capital	Current	Number of Places Full-time	Part-time
Drumry Pre-Five Project/St. Eunans	15,000	36,914	80	—
Fasque Place Centre for Pre-Fives and Families, Drumchapel	112,950	93,730	10	70
Sighthill Nursery School	0	28,300	40	80
Day Nursery, Easterhouse	42,000	68,180	30	—
Enterprise Childcare, Govan	279,200	247,369	75	—
Employment Opportunities Nursery	169,652	0	40	10
Respite Day Care for Children, North Airdrie	400	14,785	30	—
Provision for Pre-School SMH/PMH Children, Monklands	0	53,070	17	—
Kirkshaws Pre-Fives Project, Lanarkshire	52,500	23,006	20	—
Pre-Five Project, Plains, Airdrie	13,710	19,848	40	—
Pre-School Group for Mentally Handicapped, Motherwell	2,229	45,160	—	25
Thrashbush Community Under-Fives Project, North Airdrie	20,000	35,750	20	—
Laighstonehall Parents/Childrens Centre, Hamilton	68,910	63,018	—	—
Kirkwood/Kirkshaws Pre-5 Facilities	11,200	14,520	20	—
Townhead/Gartsherrie Pre-Fives Scheme	15,574	36,690	20	—
Kirkshaws/Kirkwood Pre-Five Facilities	4,447	6,180	20	—
Viewpark/Tannochside Pre-Five's Scheme, Motherwell	35,259	25,520	20	—
Larkhall Pre-Five Project, Hamilton	13,885	13,730	—	40
Bowfarm/Grieve Road Childrens Centre, Renfrew	65,700	80,760	24	—
Children and Family Centres, Moorpark, Renfrew	47,200	51,118	—	50
Integrated Family Nursery (Rainbow Centre, Port Glasgow)	112,513	66,720	35	—
West Johnstone Family Centre, Renfrew	326,550	172,441	60	—
Tayside				
Whitfield Children and Parents Centre (Aberlour)	55,000	118,273	24	12

[1] Some of the projects listed make provision for other services in addition to nursery school places eg support to parents' groups, toy libraries and home visiting.

Mr. Marc Ellington

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the sums paid to Mr. Marc Ellington for professional services by the Historic Buildings Council and Historic Buildings and Monuments in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Members of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland receive no salary or fee for their services. Mr. Marc Ellington has received no payments for professional services from Historic Buildings and Monuments during the past 10 years. In 1985, Historic Buildings and Monuments commissioned, at a cost of £6,900, a public information video from Soundcraft, a company of which Mr. Marc Ellington is a partner.

Police (Scotland) Act

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will lay before Parliament a consolidated and classified abstract of statistics collected under section 47 of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967 for the years since 1982.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: "Scottish Criminal Statistics 1983-1988" (Cm 1475) was laid before Parliament yesterday and will be published today. The information for these years contained therein has already been issued in Scottish Office Home and Health Department statistical bulletins, copies of which were sent to all Scottish Members, and placed in the Library at the time of issue.

When there is a suitable legislative opportunity, we intend to bring forward an amendment of the present

statutory requirement to publish a consolidated and classified abstract of criminal statistics to reflect the current practice of providing earlier statistical bulletins on particular topics.

Housing

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress was made in the year to 31 March 1990 in bringing houses in Scotland up to the tolerable standard; what number of houses he estimates to fall below that standard; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities estimate that, in the year to 31 March 1990, 10,507 houses were brought up to the statutory tolerable standard and a small number were closed for occupation or demolished. This is a very substantial increase over the numbers reported as being improved in previous years, although figures may not be comparable for the reasons given below.

Until results become available from the national house condition survey, on which field work begins this year, it is not possible to offer a reliable estimate of the number of houses in Scotland below the tolerable standard (BTS). The information available to me on BTS houses is drawn from returns made by local housing authorities, giving their estimates of the number of houses in their district which fail to meet the standard as at 31 March each year. Local authorities have a statutory duty to assess the condition of the stock in their districts. The Government encourage local authorities to carry out local house condition surveys to improve their information base and in June 1988 issued detailed guidance on the conduct of surveys.

By 31 March 1990, 14 local surveys had been carried out. It appears that the results have led several authorities to revise upwards their previous figures of BTS houses. The number of houses reported as BTS on 31 March 1990 is 81,049, of which we estimate some 20 per cent. to be unoccupied. The returns for each local authority are set out in the table. The reported total represents an apparent increase of 25,151 on the published estimate for 31 March 1989. Most authorities reporting high percentage increases between these dates had completed local surveys by the end of March 1990. This, with the reported substantial increase in the number of BTS houses improved over the 12-month period, suggests that the reported increase in the Scottish total in the year to 31 March 1990 results from changes in the basis of measurement and does not indicate any sudden worsening in the condition of the housing stock.

A further 15 local authorities have now carried out, or are in the process of carrying out, local surveys and 10 more are understood to be planning surveys. As more authorities take account of survey results, there may be further revisions of the basis of their BTS returns, possibly leading to further reported increases in the BTS total. Direct comparisons of estimates compiled on the basis of survey results with those submitted previously by the same authorities, or with those compiled by other authorities without the benefit of local house condition surveys, are unlikely to be valid. A new statistical framework or series may be necessary and Scottish Office officials will consider the technical issues arising with representatives of local authorities.

Our policies and the level of financial provision for housing already recognise the need for substantial investment in houses in need of improvement and repair, including houses not previously classified as being below the tolerable standard. In the five years to 1989-90, a total of 330,200 houses have been improved in the public sector, and 156,200 in the private sector with the aid of grant. At the local level it is for individual local authorities to set their own priorities for housing, but section 85 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 places a duty on them to take action on BTS houses and we expect them to have full regard to that duty in administering the improvement and repair grant system, in determining investment priorities for their own stock, and in the use of the other appropriate statutory powers at their disposal. Scottish Homes will also play an important part in improving BTS houses in certain rural areas, and has identified this as one of the main priorities of its rural strategy.

Dwellings below the tolerable standard, 31 March 1990

District	*Number*
Scotland	81,049
Borders	
Berwickshire	723
Ettrick and Lauderdale	459
Roxburgh	939
Tweeddale[1]	500
Central	
Clackmannan	955
Falkirk	382
Stirling	458
Dumfries and Galloway	
Annandale and Eskdale	187
Nithsdale	1,032
Stewartry	144
Wigtown	70
Fife	
Dunfermline	327
Kirkcaldy	475
North East Fife	1,034
Grampian	
Aberdeen	1,130
Banff and Buchan	1,434
Gordon	907
Kincardine and Deeside	350
Moray	1,147
Highland	
Badenoch and Strathspey	242
Caithness	354
Inverness	1,200
Lochaber	400
Nairn	29
Ross and Cromarty[1]	2,500
Skye and Lochalsh[1]	600
Sutherland	427
Lothian	
East Lothian	1,682
Edinburgh	4,785
Midlothian	399
West Lothian	426
Strathclyde	
Argyll and Bute	7,440
Bearsden and Milngavie	29
Clydebank[1]	11
Clydesdale	297
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	53
Cumnock and Doon Valley	187
Cunninghame[1]	1,950

District	Number
Dumbarton	91
East Kilbride	92
Eastwood	12
Glasgow	31,819
Hamilton	740
Inverclyde	3,318
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	168
Kyle and Carrick	350
Monklands	184
Motherwell	647
Renfrew	1,110
Strathkelvin	20
Tayside	
Angus[1]	882
Dundee	2,052
Perth and Kinross	670
Islands Councils	
Orkney Islands	1,117
Shetland Islands	881
Western Isles	1,232

[1] 1990 return is outstanding. Figures are for 31 March 1989.

Leukaemia

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the report of the case study of leukaemia in the Dounreay area, recommended by the second report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment will be published.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The report will be published tomorrow in the *British Medical Journal* and copies will be available in the House. The report, commissioned by the Scottish Office Home and Health Department, prepared by the information and statistics division of the Common Services Agency, concludes that the observed excess incidence of childhood leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma—NHL—in the area within 25 km of Dounreay cannot be explained by paternal exposure to ionising radiation prior to conception. The authors point out that an apparent association between the use of beaches by the children in the vicinity of Dounreay and the incidence of childhood leukaemia and NHL should be treated with caution.

COMARE has stated in its advice that these results taken alone do not suggest paternal employment at Dounreay nuclear establishment as a factor in the causation of childhood leukaemia/NHL in the neighbourhood and indeed make it clear that such employment cannot be a full explanation of the excess incidence observed in the vicinity of Dounreay. However, the statistical power of the study is inevitably very low and the study cannot refute the suggestion from the study of Gardner et al, that fathers' recorded external radiation dose may be related to the incidence of leukaemia/NHL in their offspring.

The Dounreay study has been referred to the independent expert Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). The text of its advice, which the Government have accepted, is as follows:

COMARE Statement of Advice

Results of a case control study of leukaemia and non Hodgkins Lymphoma in children in Caithness near the Dounreay nuclear installation—Urquhart J. D., Black R. J., Muirhead M. J., Sharp L., Maxwell M., Eden O. B., Adams Jones D.

Background

1. In 1988 COMARE published its second report "Investigation of the possible increased incidence of leukaemia in young people near the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment, Caithness, Scotland" (1). The report made eight recommendations to Government. The first of these concerned a case control study of young people registered as cases of leukaemia or lymphoma in the Dounreay area. The study was commissioned by the Scottish Home and Health Department in 1988 and was undertaken by the Information and Statistics Division of the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service in conjunction with the Department of Paediatric Haematology, Royal Hospital for Sick Children Edinburgh. DN The findings have now been published in the British Medical Journal (2).

2. The authors' stated objective was "To examine whether the observed excess of childhood leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in the area around the Dounreay Nuclear Installation is associated with established risk factors or with factors related to the plant or with parental occupation in the nuclear industry".

3. The Minister of State at the Scottish Home and Health Department referred the results of the studies to COMARE for consideration and advice.

The Study

4. The authors ascertained 14 cases of leukaemia or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) in under 15 year olds, resident in Caithness, registered between 1968 and 1986. Controls were matched for date of birth and mother's place of residence at child's birth (either within 25km of Dounreay or within the remainder of Caithness). Data from birth certificates and parental employment records from the nuclear industry were analysed for 13 cases and 47 controls. Questionnaire data were analysed for 11 cases and 36 controls.

5. In an attempt to explain the excess incidence of leukaemia and NHL in the Dounreay area, particularly between 1979 and 1986, the authors examined possible associations with a variety of factors relating to the child and/or the child's parents. These included parental occupation, age and social class, maternal birth place, family medical history, pregnancy history, possible exposure to non-ionising radiation and various aspects of lifestyle.

6. The study found that none of the cases of leukaemia or NHL had been exposed ante natally to diagnostic x-rays. In the analysis of parental occupation, children with leukaemia or NHL in either the immediate vicinity of Dounreay or in the rest of Caithness were found to be no more likely to have fathers who were, or had been employed in the nuclear industry, than were control children without malignant disease.

7. In the analysis of many other factors, the only associations to achieve statistical significance were the use of local beaches by case children in the years prior to diagnosis and the receipt of prescription medication by case mothers when pregnant. However, no two case mothers received the same medication.

COMARE's advice to Government

8. COMARE has considered this study and our advice is set out below.

General Considerations

9. In our second report [1] we noted the considerable problems in interpretation of findings based on very small numbers of cases. As there were only 11 cases for the questionnaire based study, and 13 for the birth certificate/employment record study any conclusion drawn from these results remains open to some uncertainty. It is not possible to assess whether interpretation of parts of the data may have been biased by the unavoidable exclusion of three cases from the questionnaire study or by the use of retrospective questionnaire data based on parental recall or by some of the difficulties in recruiting controls.

10. Nevertheless, the study was justified by the need to elucidate factors of possible relevance to the excess incidence of childhood leukaemia/NHL in the vicinity of the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment (DNE). In addition there is a need to accumulate information from areas around several nuclear sites as part of our overall strategy for evaluting possible causes of childhood malignancy in those areas.

11. Therefore, we have considered the results of this study in terms of whether it can provide a statistical explanation for the excess of childhood leukaemia in the Dounreay locality specifically, and in the wider context of other published studies. We have given particular consideration to how the results relate to those of the similar study undertaken by Gardner et al in West Cumbria [3].

Methodology

12. The Committee consider that the methods of investigation were appropriate to the aims of the study.

Results

13. The authors observe that for children resident within 25 km of Dounreay, only 2 of 8 cases (25 per cent.) of leukaemia/NHL had fathers employed at DNE at any time compared with 12 of 25 controls (48 per cent.). These results, taken alone, do not suggest paternal employment at DNE as a factor in the causation of childhood leukaemia/NHL in the neighbourhood and indeed make it clear that such employment cannot be a full explanation of the excess incidence observed in the vicinity of Dounreay. However, the statistical power of the study is inevitably very low and the study cannot refute the suggestion from the study of Gardner et al [3], that fathers' recorded external radiation dose may be related to the incidence of leukaemia/NHL in their offspring.

14. We note the finding of an apparent association between the use of the beaches in the proximity of Dounreay by children and the development of leukaemia/NHL. We advise that this finding should be interpreted with considerable caution since:

14.1 it relates to five cases only;

14.2 it is based on parental recall some years after the event which may be subject to human error;

14.3 the only comparable study [3] did not produce a similar result;

14.4 information, currently available, on the levels of radioactivity on the beaches, suggests that these are far too low to cause leukaemia on the basis of accepted models of leukaemogenesis.

Nevertheless, we will incorporate a review of the Dounreay beach monitoring data into our future work programme.

15. Data on proximity of home address to the microwave communications installation outside Thurso were analysed for those 8 cases living within 25 km of Dounreay and 25 controls. We agree broadly with the authors' conclusion that the results of this analysis do not support the hypothesis that the microwave transmitter could be a source of risk. However, we will subject the matter to more detailed investigation with respect to the possible spread and power of the beam and its relation to places of residence of cases and controls.

General conclusions

16. We consider that this study does not identify an explanation for the excess of childhood leukaemia/NHL around Dounreay. The disparity beteween these findings and those of Gardner *et al* in Cumbria tends to weaken but does not exclude the suggestion that these two excesses have a similar causation. At the same time, the findings in this small study fail to support but do not negate the suggestion of an association between paternal employment in the nuclear industry and leukaemia/NHL in children. We would reiterate the views expressed in the final conclusion of our 2nd report [1]. These were that the evidence of a raised incidence of leukaemia near Dounreay, taken in conjunction with that relating to the area round Sellafield is sufficient to warrant an intensified programme of investigation.

17. We undertake to update our advice on these issues as further relevant research data become available.

1. Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) second report London HMSO 1988 ISBN 0 11 32111422.

2. Urquhart J. D., Black R. J., *et al.* Results of a Case Control Study of Leukaemia and non-Hodgkins lymphoma in children in Caithness near the Dounreay nuclear installation, [BMJ 1991, *302*, 687-692].

3. Gardner M. J., Snee M. P. *et al.* Results of Case Control Study of leukaemia and lumphoma among young people near Sellafield nuclear plant in West Cumbria BMJ 1990, *300*, 423-429.

Health Service

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Greater Glasgow health board about the effect on service provision of further reductions of income due to SHARE—Scottish health authorities revenue equalisation—parity adjustments.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 19 March 1991]:* The Government's policy is to move gradually towards SHARE parity in a way which avoids turbulence. The implications of this for Greater Glasgow health board is kept under regular review in discussion between the board and the management executive.

Children

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding the number of children *(a)* on the child protection register, *(b)* in care in local authority accommodation and *(c)* in foster placements in respect of each regional and islands authority at the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* Information from child protection registers maintained by social work departments is not held centrally. The most recent available information about the accommodation of children in care or under supervision is published in table 4 of statistical bulletin No. CC13/1990 "Children in Care or Under Supervision as at 31 March 1989". This publication is available in the House Library.

Table 4
Children in care at 31 March 1989
By accommodation

Responsible social work authority	At home	Community: Relatives/ friends	Community: Foster parents	Community: Other[1]	Community: Total	Residential: Local authority home	Residential: Voluntary home	Residential: Residential school	Residential: Special school	Residential: Assessment centre	Residential: Other[2]	Residential: Total	Grand total
Borders	60	12	23	14	109	8	0	1	3	0	0	12	121
Central	353	24	104	54	535	38	2	10	3	19	22	94	629
Dumfries/Galloway	70	7	86	9	172	32	7	0	0	5	5	49	221
Fife	105	27	75	19	226	4	1	3	9	11	21	49	275
Grampian	345	31	341	31	648	103	5	52	4	0	10	174	822
Highland	202	30	191	4	427	27	1	2	5	11	5	51	478
Lothian	687	14	346	48	1,095	102	17	63	20	22	23	247	1,342
Strathclyde	4,049	374	1,261	52	5,736	724	79	405	81	69	90	1,448	7,184
Tayside	349	69	211	26	655	80	58	23	9	20	26	216	871
Orkney	21	0	3	0	24	3	0	0	1	0	0	4	28
Shetland	5	3	11	0	19	4	0	0	1	0	0	5	24
Western Isles	16	3	8	0	27	14	0	0	0	1	0	15	42

Responsible social work authority	Community: At home	Relatives/friends	Foster parents	Other[1]	Total	Local authority home	Residential: Voluntary home	Residential school	Special school	Assessment centre	Other[2]	Total	Grand total
SCOTLAND Total	6,262	594	2,560	257	9,673	1,139	170	559	136	158	202	2,364	12,037
Per cent.	52	5	21	2	80	9	1	5	1	1	2	20	100

[1] Includes private lodgings and prospective adopters.
[2] Includes hospitals, hostels and other forms of residential accommodation not elsewhere specified.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Administrative Tribunals

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Attorney-General if the Council on Tribunals will publish draft model rules of procedure for administrative tribunals in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor and the Lord Advocate yesterday received copies of a special report to Parliament by the Council on Tribunals on draft model rules of procedure for administrative tribunals. It offers much helpful and practical advice to policy-makers and those responsible for drafting tribunal procedural rules which will be of great value in future in preparing procedural rules for new tribunals or amending the rules of existing tribunals. The Government welcome the report and are grateful to the Council on Tribunals for reporting on this matter. The report is available from HMSO (Cm. 1434).

NATIONAL FINANCE

London Weighting

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) why London weighting for civil servants has been frozen since April 1988; and when he proposes to increase it to meet the increased cost of living in London;

(2) why his Department has refused to go to arbitration over the question of London weighting for civil servants;

(3) whether he has any plans to abolish London weighting for civil servants; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government have no plans to abolish the London weighting paid to civil servants.

The Government's policy is that pay in London, as elsewhere, should be based on what is required to recruit, retain, and motivate within what is affordable and to target pay to get the best value for taxpayers' money. Since 1988, an additional £87 million has been put into London pay, equivalent to more than a 50 per cent. increase in London weighting, through targeted increases. Recruitment and retention rates have improved significantly since 1988. Against this background, there was no justification for any across-the-board increases in London weighting.

London weighting was last increased on 1 July 1988. Successive Governments have reserved the right not to go to arbitration on issues which raise policy considerations. The 1989 and 1990 claims by the Council of Civil Service Unions raised such considerations in respect of the Government's policies on the targeting of pay and the control of public expenditure. I could not therefore agree to a joint approach to the civil service arbitration tribunal.

THE ARTS

Liverpool Playhouse

Mr. Parry: To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received concerning the future of the Liverpool Playhouse theatre at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members, and from others, on behalf of the Liverpool Playhouse. Although I have no direct involvement in this matter, I am being kept abreast of developments by the playhouse and the Arts Council. I understand that the appointed administrator is continuing his efforts, in consultation with a range of local interests and the Arts Council, to resolve the company's financial difficulties. I very much hope there will be a successful outcome.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Rights of the Child

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the United Kingdom's ratification of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are making good progress. The Whitehall review of the convention has now taken place and we have identified the few areas where we envisage the need to enter reservations upon ratification in respect of the United Kingdom mainland. They are immigration and nationality, juvenile custody, employment, termination of pregnancy and children's hearings in Scotland. We are consulting the dependent territories and United Kingdom islands about their inclusion and will ratify the convention as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Smoking

Sir David Price: To ask the Prime Minister if he will seek to establish co-ordination between the Department of Health's policies on the discouragement of smoking and support through the common agricultural policy for tobacco growing.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has long been critical of the EC tobacco support regime and has consistently pressed for measures to reduce the level of subsidy.

Ministers at the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have raised the matter with their European colleagues on many occasions and will continue to do so.

The Commission has agreed to bring forward proposals shortly for a revision of the tobacco regime and, although details are not yet available, we are hopeful of progress.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 21 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Public Utilities

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will institute a study into the advantages and disadvantages of inter-sectoral mergers, takeovers and share stakes in the public utilities.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to instigate such a study. Current legislation provides a sufficient safeguard for the public interest in relation to mergers, including those involving privatised utilities.

President Bush

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what matters were discussed in his meeting in Bermuda with President Bush.

The Prime Minister: We discussed a wide range of subjects, including the aftermath of the Gulf crisis, middle east security issues, the Soviet Union, the Uruguay round, South Africa and arms control.

HEALTH

General Practitioners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how, under the present remuneration system, general practitioners as a whole may be rewarded for new work and responsibilities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The doctors and dentists review body takes account of evidence on any changes in general practitioners' work load and responsibilities when making its recommendations each year on the level of GPs' average net remuneration.

Exhibitions

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Pre-School Playgroups Association to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 20 to 24 May.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Children's Society to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 7 to 10 May.

Sheep Dip

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning organophosphorous toxicity arising from the dipping of sheep; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received four inquiries regarding possible adverse effects from the organophosphorus sheep dips during the past 10 months. Organophosphorus sheep dip, if properly used, are unlikely to cause harm, although a few people may be unusually sensitive. I understand that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is currently reviewing sheep dips.

Anybody who considers that they may have been adversely affected by exposure to sheep dips should report the matter to the veterinary medicines directorate at Weybridge.

Departmental Property

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many properties owned and administered by his Department have been empty for *(a)* more than six months or *(b)* more than one year; and what is the regional distribution of these properties.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Health Service has some 4,000 hectares of land which is surplus to requirements and in process of disposal. The distribution between regional health authorities is as follows:

Region	*Surplus land area (hectares)*
Northern	355
Yorkshire	509
Trent	535
East Anglia	94
North West Thames	86
North East Thames	335
South East Thames	394
South West Thames	287
Wessex	25
Oxford	91
South Western	182
West Midlands	573
Mersey	278
North Western	339

Detailed information about the length of time National Health Service property has been empty is not held centrally.

Adoption

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government have any plans to establish an agency for inter-country adoption.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to establish such an agency. There are 108 local authorities in England which are adoption agencies and a further 37 approved adoption societies. Guidance was issued in

September to each of these agencies in relation to the provision of services for inter-country adoption. A copy of CI(90)17 is available in the Library. We expect to issue further guidance shortly.

Leicestershire Health Authority

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the new administrative posts created by Leicestershire health authorities in 1989-90 and 1990-91 have been filled; what are the job descriptions for the posts; and what is the salary for each post;

(2) how many new administrative posts were created by Leicestershire health authority in each of the years (i) 1988-89, (ii) 1989-90 and (iii) 1990-91; and how much was spent on advertising those posts.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Townsend, the chairman of Leicestershire health authority, for details.

Ambulance Services

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each ambulance authority the number of journeys cancelled due to no vehicle being available in each of the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for 1989-90 for each ambulance authority the percentage of emergency calls where response time was within *(a)* 14 minutes and *(b)* seven minutes.

Mr. Dorrell: Figures for response times are collected centrally only at seven and 14 minutes for metropolitan authorities. These are given in table 1.

Data for response times for non-metropolitan authorities are collected at eight and 20 minutes. These are shown in table 2.

Patient Transport Services 1989-90: Table 1
Quality of Service
Emergency calls: Response times: Metropolitan authorities England

Ambulance authority	*Percentage of calls where response within 7 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 14 minutes*
Northumbria Met.	52·6	95·4
West Yorkshire Met.	36·7	90·5
South Yorkshire Met.	28·5	70·7
London Ambulance Service	14·3	78·8
West Midlands Met.	49·0	34·0
Mersey Met.	63·2	98·2
Greater Manchester Met.	46·6	93·1

Source: KA34. DH Statistics and Management information (SM12B) 1990.

Table 2
Patient transport services 1989-90
Quality of service
Emergency calls: response times: non-Metropolitan authorities England

Ambulance authority	*Percentage of calls where response within 8 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 20 minutes*
Cleveland	53·0	85·6
Cumbria	58·0	94·1
Durham	82·7	96·2
Humberside	71·6	99·6
North Yorkshire	61·4	94·3
Derbyshire	48·3	96·5
Leicestershire	53·0	96·4
Lincolnshire	64·0	95·7
Nottinghamshire	42·8	68·7
Cambridgeshire	43·9	88·7
Norfolk	62·5	97·7
Suffolk	49·7	87·8
Bedfordshire	60·3	97·7
Hertfordshire	57·2	96·0
Essex	41·6	79·1
East Sussex	52·2	70·5
Kent	60·8	96·5
Surrey	57·8	92·9
West Sussex	63·8	94·3
Dorset	62·2	94·9
Hampshire	50·3	97·5
Wiltshire	58·9	93·9
Isle of Wight	45·8	82·9
Berkshire	41·1	84·2
Buckinghamshire	59·0	95·3
Northamptonshire	60·0	98·0
Oxfordshire	46·2	81·2
Avon	57·9	95·7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	40·9	89·6
Devon	59·5	98·8
Gloucestershire	n/a	97·6
Somerset	53·8	86·5
Hereford and Worcester	59·5	95·4
Shropshire	49·6	92·2
Staffordshire	50·3	98·0
Warwickshire	74·0	93·9
Cheshire	54·1	94·0
Lancashire	70·9	99·1

Source: DH Statistics and Management Information 1990.

Dentists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists on each family health services authority list withdrew and how many joined between 1 October 1989 and 1 October 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1 October 1989 and 1 October 1990, 3,666 dentists withdrew from FHSA dental lists in England, and 4,047 dentists were added to those lists. This represents a net increase of 381. The details for each FHSA in England are set out in the table.

Changes to the number of registered dentists on FHSA lists between 1st October 1989 and 1st October 1990 (England only)

FHSA	*Withdrawals*	*Additions*	*Net change*
Cleveland	42	52	10
Cumbria	26	31	5
Durham	31	42	11
Northumberland	22	29	7
Gateshead	14	17	3
Newcastle upon Tyne	20	35	15
North Tyneside	16	25	9
South Tyneside	17	15	−2
Sunderland	34	29	−5
Humberside	48	52	4
North Yorkshire	59	64	5
Bradford	30	48	18

FHSA	Withdrawals	Additions	Net change
Calderdale	19	24	5
Kirklees	27	25	−2
Leeds	87	76	−11
Wakefield	17	22	5
Derbyshire	35	47	12
Leicestershire	54	46	−8
Lincolnshire	21	23	2
Nottinghamshire	48	66	18
Barnsley	25	25	0
Doncaster	19	20	1
Rotherham	13	23	10
Sheffield	40	42	2
Cambridgeshire	29	37	8
Norfolk	40	60	20
Suffolk	36	44	8
Bedfordshire	37	30	−7
Hertfordshire	104	111	7
Barnet	40	42	2
Brent and Harrow	33	43	10
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	80	90	10
Hillingdon	19	24	5
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	109	82	−27
Essex	103	106	3
Barking and Havering	29	26	−3
Camden and Islington	57	57	0
City and East London	58	54	−4
Enfield and Haringey	36	56	20
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	62	55	−7
East Sussex	52	54	2
Kent	132	153	21
Greenwich and Bexley	34	35	1
Bromley	31	23	−8
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	120	115	−5
Surrey	120	117	−3
West Sussex	50	56	6
Croydon	41	39	−2
Kingston and Richmond	29	29	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandworth	71	71	0
Dorset	36	52	16
Hampshire	100	111	11
Wiltshire	25	31	6
Isle of Wight	8	9	1
Berkshire	50	64	14
Buckinghamshire	59	62	3
Northamptonshire	20	27	7
Oxfordshire	41	48	7
Avon	90	94	4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	19	23	4
Devon	61	60	−1
Gloucestershire	45	48	3
Somerset	23	22	−1
Hereford and Worcester	40	44	4
Salop	14	18	4
Staffordshire	31	54	23
Warwickshire	29	30	1
Birmingham	64	50	−14
Coventry	16	18	2
Dudley	22	24	2
Sandwell	16	22	6
Solihull	15	21	6
Walsall	10	12	2
Wolverhampton	10	11	1
Cheshire	89	103	14
Liverpool	36	41	5
St. Helens and Knowsley	20	29	9
Sefton	19	22	3
Wirral	30	44	14
Lancashire	100	105	5
Bolton	17	17	0
Bury	12	17	5
Manchester	65	82	17
Oldham	16	25	9
Rochdale	11	15	4
Salford	27	25	−2
Stockport	15	22	7
Tameside	12	16	4
Trafford	25	22	−3
Wigan	12	20	8

FHSA	Withdrawals	Additions	Net change
TOTAL	3,666	4,047	381

Note: These figures are derived from information on the number of registered dentists on an FHSA list as notified by FHSAs to the Dental Practice Board. Since some dentists practise in more than one FHSA, the total number of different dentists for England is less than the sum of the dentists for individual FHSAs.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will publish its code of practice.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has today published a consultation document containing its proposals for the code of practice. Comments and suggestions have been invited from an extensive range of interested organisations and from treatment and research centres which are to be regulated.

Once the consultation exercise is complete, the authority will prepare a further draft of the code. In accordance with section 26 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, this will then be subject to approval by the Secretary of State before it is laid before Parliament.

Continence Services

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the proposed review of continence services.

Mr. Dorrell: Officials have started work on a review of policy and practice across the range of continence services, including the supply of continence aids. We are already aware of the variety of provision and the aim of the review will be to identify good practice in the organisation and delivery of such services and to make recommendations for action designed to promote that good practice throughout the country. Officials have been asked to deliver their report by the end of June 1991. I will make the report available in the Library and to interested bodies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hunting, New Forest

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, if he will seek a report from the chief constable of Hampshire as to what the costs were of police overtime for presence at hunts in the New Forest on boxing day 1990 and new year's day 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that the estimated costs for police overtime arising from policing the hunts on boxing day 1990 and new year's day 1991 were £2,771 and £1,373 respectively.

Crime Prevention Week

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much the advertising agency Collett, Dickinson, Pearce and Partners will receive for developing plans for advertising for Crime Prevention Week;

(2) what is the cost of the national advertising campaign for Crime Prevention Week;

(3) what is the cost of the promotion work by Clerk Hooper Consulting for Crime Prevention Week;

(4) what is the cost of television commercials for national Crime Prevention Week.

Mr. John Patten: The cost of the Crime Prevention Week advertising campaign will be £3,600,000, including VAT, of which nearly £1,450,000 is for television commercials. The cost of non-advertising promotional activity for the week will be £900,000, including VAT. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the Government do not disclose the rate of commission or the fees negotiated with individual agencies.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what resources are to be given to local planning groups for Crime Prevention Week;

(2) what resources are being given to local authorities to develop crime prevention initiatives for Crime Prevention Week;

(3) what extra resources are to be given to local authorities to build on the work of Crime Prevention Week.

Mr. John Patten: The resources made available by the Government consist of a large volume of publicity material, including a campaign planning guide and extensive advertising, which it is expected will provide valuable support for activity organised at local level by the police, local authorities and other bodies and individuals with an interest in crime prevention.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to prevent the publicity surrounding Crime Prevention Week from enhancing the fear of crime.

Mr. John Patten: The need to avoid increasing the fear of crime was taken fully into account in preparing advertising and publicity for Crime Prevention Week. One of the most important messages of the week will be that many crimes can be prevented by members of the public taking sensible precautions against them.

Departmental Property

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many properties, owned and administered by his Department, have stood empty *(a)* for over six months or *(b)* for over one year; and what is the regional distribution of these properties.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is assumed that the question relates to housing. The best estimate of the numbers of empty prison service properties, as at 1 March 1991, was 458, as set out in the table by region.

	North	Midland	South East	South West	Total
Vacant for security reasons or redevelopment	29	45	17	3	94
Vacant for re-allocation to designated staff	21	16	12	7	56
Awaiting demolition	63	—	—	—	63
On market for sale	165	36	8	6	215
Awaiting disposal	13	12	1	4	30
TOTALS	291	109	38	20	458

Information on the length of time for which these properties have been vacant is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In addition, the Home Office directorate of telecommunications owns some properties which have been vacant for more than 12 months. Three of these are in the midlands, one in the south-west and one in the south-east.

Women Prisoners

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the maximum number of hours spent by a woman in seclusion at a women's prison or young offenders' institution over the last 12 months; and what is the average number of hours spent by women in seclusion.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not available in the form requested. Inmates may be removed from normal prison location at their own request or as a result of their behaviour. Inevitably the regime available to them is limited, but wherever circumstances allow they are able to associate with others in a similar position. Whatever the reason for their segregation, inmates will receive regular visits from the governor, medical officer and chaplain, and the staff on the unit on which they are held will be available to them as necessary.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have sought asylum in Britain during the past 12 months; how many have been granted, how many refused and how many are pending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A fully reliable estimate of the number of applications for asylum in the United Kingdom in 1990 cannot yet be made, but provisional indications are that it was of the order of 30,000, including associated dependants. This figure does not include applications for upgrading to refugee status by those previously granted exceptional leave.

Comprehensive information on decisions in 1990 on asylum applications is not yet available. Decisions recorded to date are shown in the following table, but these understate because of delays in recording.

Decisions[1] on applications[2] for asylum in the United Kingdom made in 1990

	Numbers
Granted asylum	1,600
Granted exceptional leave	3,700
Refused asylum or exceptional leave	650

[1] Including associated dependants.
[2] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in 1990.

Provisional indications are that about 38,000 asylum applications, including associated dependants, were awaiting a decision in the United Kingdom at 31 December 1990. However, this estimate overstates the position because of under-recording of decisions made earlier.

Fuller and more reliable estimates of applications, decisions and applications outstanding in 1990 will be published as usual in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin "Refugee Statistics, United Kingdom" later this year.

Voluntary Sector Funding

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken following publication of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On 4 April last year, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), *Official Report*, column *639*, my predecessor announced the publication of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector. He said that this would provide the basis for improving arrangements to ensure that the money was used both efficiently and for good purposes. Generally, the report has had a favourable response both within the voluntary sector and elsewhere.

Departments have now considered the scrutiny recommendations as they affect individual grant schemes and have drawn up action plans for taking forward and implementing these recommendations. The aim will be to implement all the agreed changes by September 1993, but some Departments will be able to put new arrangements in place earlier.

I am placing in the Library a statement, "Profiting From Partnership—The Implementation Process", explaining the action which Departments will be taking. This will also be available to voluntary organisations and other interested parties on request from the voluntary services unit in the Home Office.

The majority of the recommendations of the scrutiny report fall to be considered in relation to each grant scheme or programme individually. In general, these are accepted where they are applicable and, where they are not already departmental practice, will be implemented in the light of the principles set out in the statement of 4 April 1990. However, not all the recommendations are applicable to all individual grant schemes and programmes.

There are also a number of recommendations which relate to the role of the voluntary services unit—VSU—of the Home Office. The VSU intends to issue a revised statement of its role later in 1991. The VSU will also be taking the lead in co-ordinating the work to affect the implementation of those recommendations which are cross-departmental.

Preliminary discussions have been held with the voluntary sector about the scrutiny report in general.

Departments will take account of the views of the organisations that they fund and of representative bodies working within their policy areas in carrying out the process of review.

Electoral Roll

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* aged over 17 and under 26 years and eligible to vote in a general election and *(b)* aged 16 or 17 years in the United Kingdom on the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

No data are collected about the ages of people eligible to vote. There were 628,858 people on the 1990 parliamentary electoral registers in the United Kingdom who were aged 16 or 17 on the qualifying date and who became 18 and eligible to vote during the currency of that register up to 15 February 1991. Information about the 1991 register which came into use on 16 February is still being collected centrally by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. This information will be made available by the end of May.

ENERGY

Oil Exploration, Wiltshire

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of oil exploration in Wiltshire.

Mr. Moynihan: No significant discoveries of oil have been made to date in Wiltshire. Since the reply given to my hon. Friend's similar question on 26 October 1989 at column *519*, two further seismic survey programmes and one geochemical soil test have been carried out under petroleum licences covering parts of the county.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list all incidents and occurrences, including radioactive dose exposure to employees, involving the release or potential release of radioactive matter from high-level waste slurry/sludge storage tanks that have been reported to his Department or lodged with the nuclear installations Inspectorate under the established reporting procedures, in each of the last five years;

(2) if he will list the size, number and types of storage tanks at each location in the United Kingdom at which high-level radioactive waste is stored; whether the waste is acid or alkali; what is the rate of hydrogen evolution from such tanks; and what is the method of purging this;

(3) if he will name each establishment in the United Kingdom where liquid and/or slurry/sludge high-level radioactive waste is processed, treated and stored; and what is the volume and total radioactive inventory and radionuclide composition of the high-level wastes stored at each such location.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: High-level liquid waste is produced in the United Kingdom at Sellafield and Dounreay, and is stored on site. Details of quantities and activity may be found in the United Kingdom inventory of radioactive waste, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

The high-level waste is acidic. Hydrogen evolution does occur, but levels are extremely low and the tanks are continuously ventilated.

There have been no reportable incidents or occurrences involving high-level liquid waste storage tanks in the past five years.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provision he is making to ensure grant entitlement under the home energy efficiency scheme for those who cannot complete and sign their application forms for reasons of illiteracy, disability, illness or incapacity.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the Home Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations 1990, the applicant for a grant under the home energy efficiency scheme must be a householder, although the person in receipt of a qualifying benefit may be the householder or the householder's spouse. There is no requirement for the applicant to complete the form him or herself, although the applicant is required to sign.

For the very few cases where the inability to sign an application form causes difficulties, we are examining urgently whether the regulations would permit some form of proxy signature or other alternative. In the event that no satisfactory solution can be found, amending regulations will be introduced at an early opportunity.

National Power

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration he has given to the implications for the maximising of revenue from privatisations of Nomura Securities' acquisition of a 9 per cent. stake in National Power other than by purchase from the Department of Energy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The market for equity in National Power and PowerGen was thoroughly tested through competitive book-building in the period before impact day. In addition, some of the benefit of the market rise during the offer period was obtained for the taxpayer through an international tender. I am satisfied that all appropriate steps to maximise proceeds were taken, having regard to other policy objectives. It is for investors to decide whether and if so how they wish to participate in the second market.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Environmental Issues

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider to seek to establish a Northern Ireland environmental protection agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to establish an independent environmental protection agency for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentlemen will be aware that the Environment Committee of this House, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, recommended the establishment of such a body. I am at present examining the recommendations in this report. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to recommendation 21 in the first report of the Environment Committee of Session 1990-91 entitled "Environmental Issues in Northern Ireland"; and when the Department of the Environment will carry out a review of the effects of current policies on residential development in the countryside and institute a policy which will enable rural planning policy to be relaxed, and crossroads development to take place.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Environment Committee of this House, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, recommended a review of planning policies on residential development in the countryside. I am at present examining the recommendations in this report. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to ensure that long-term environmental considerations are fully taken into account when financial inducements are given to incoming investors to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Environment Committee of this House, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, recommended that the Government take steps to prevent the contamination of land by industry. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will introduce a system of grant-aid for the clean-up of contaminated sites.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will establish a register of contaminated land in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentlemen will be aware that the Environment Committee of this House, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, expressed concern about contaminated land. I am at present examining the recommendations in this report. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to recommendation No. 15 in the first report of the Environment Committee of Session 1990-91 entitled "Environmental Issues in Northern Ireland"; and what action the Government will adopt to reduce the incidents of eutrophication of inland waters.

Mr. Needham: The Government are at present examining this recommendation, as part of their consideration of the Environment Committee's report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to the conclusion No. 25 in the first report of the Environment Committee of Session 1990-91 entitled "Environmental Issues in Northern Ireland"; and whether the Government will adopt measures such as national parks and management plans for areas such as the Mournes in the constituency of South Down.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Environment Committee of this House, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, recommended measures such as national parks and management plans. I am at present examining the recommendations in this report. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Former Courtaulds Site

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is responsible for cleaning up the former Courtaulds site near Carrickfergus.

Mr. Needham: Responsibility for cleaning up this site lies with the new owners.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken to prevent pollution from solvents and drums of chemicals left at the former Courtaulds site near Carrickfergus.

Mr. Needham: Provided that the Carrickfergus borough council is satisfied that no public health nuisance exists, and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is satisfied that no water pollution is occurring, action on the former Courtaulds site would be the responsibility of a new owner who wished to develop the site.

The Department has established that certain inorganic wastes are present on the site and will continue to monitor the situation.

Unemployment

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give an estimate of the level of unemployment in each of the 17 Northern Ireland constituencies in both 1979 and 1991.

Mr. Needham: The information requested for parliamentary constituencies is not available prior to October 1984. Data from October 1984 onwards can be obtained from the House of Commons Library and information post-June 1986 is available from the NOMIS database which can also be accessed on-line by House of Commons Library staff.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Expenditure, Leicestershire

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent on education in Leicestershire in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available, adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Fallon: Leicestershire's returns show that it spent some £131 million cash on education in 1979-80, and some £289 million cash in 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. At 1988-89 prices this represents some £247 million in 1979-80 and £289 million in 1988-89, an increase of 17 per cent.

National Curriculum

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to lay the orders on the national curriculum for history and geography; and in what respect they will differ from the draft.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I expect to lay these orders shortly. I cannot anticipate them.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 8 March, columns *299-300*, he will give an estimate of the cost, in the case of each named city technology college, of visits and other attention by Her Majesty's inspectorate; and whether any part of this cost has been charged to the city technology college.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The approximate direct cost of the visits made by Her Majesty's inspectorate to the city technology colleges is as follows:

Kingshurst: £3,750
Djanogly and Macmillan: £3,750 each
Bradford, Emmanuel, Harris and Leigh: £1,325 each

Under section 77(2) of the 1944 Education Act I have a duty to cause inspections to be made of all educational establishments at such intervals as appear to me to be appropriate. City technology colleges are independent schools and HMI inspects such schools under section 70 of the Act. All visits by HMI to maintained and independent schools are made at no cost to the institution. As a consequence, no part of the cost of visits has been charged to the city technology colleges.

Belize

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what contribution is being made by British scientific expertise to the protection of the rain forest and coral reef in Belize.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Neither this Department nor the Natural Environment Research Council is currently funding or undertaking any work in Belize.

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the Number of permanent staff employed by the AFRC in 1984 and in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There were 5,660 permanent staff in post at AFRC-funded institutes and AFRC central office on 1 April 1984.

The figure for 1 April 1991 is estimated at 3,225, including 450 staff who are employed by AFRC but seconded to Horticulture Research International.

Environmental Education

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the new Open university initiative on environmental education; and when he next expects to visit the Open university to discuss the development of environmental education.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I welcome the steps which the Open university has taken to integrate its environmental courses and develop an interdisciplinary environmental education programme. The Open university's contribution to this area was recognised in the environment White Paper, and has been supported by grants from bodies including the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. I understand that the University's proposals for environmental education were further discussed during the visit by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment in October last year.

I am expecting to visit the university in July, when I hope to see a range of its activities at first hand.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was spent on youth training in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest available year.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure on youth training in 1979-80 was £123·4 million[1]. The estimated expenditure on youth training (YT) in 1990-91 is expected to be £833 million[2].

[1] Youth opportunities programme (YOP).
[2] As published in the departmental report (Cm. 1501-1519).

Careers Service

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will publish the findings from the review of the careers service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I am currently studying a report by my officials on the review of career guidance. I intend to consult especially training and enterprise councils and local education authorities about the future of the careers service.

Ports

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what change there has been in *(a)* operating costs and *(b)* profits to port employers since the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: Port employers' operating costs will reflect the fact that since 1988, when the estimated total wage bill of registered dock workers was £175 million, some three quarters of them have been made redundant. A fuller picture of the benefits of abolition will emerge during the next few weeks, as port authorities publish their financial results for 1990.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reduction there has been in dock dues to port customers since the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: Rates charged by ports to their main customers are a commercial matter between those parties.

TRANSPORT

Orange Badge Scheme

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many letters his Department has received on the orange badge scheme for each of the last six months;

(2) how many staff in his Department spend most of their time dealing with inquiries relating to the orange badge scheme.

Mr. Chope: The following number of letters were received in the last six months:

	Number
September	122
October	136
November	116
December	68
January	121
February	106

and it is estimated that there are more than 1 million orange badge holders.

Three members of the Department's staff are primarily employed in answering inquiries from them and others.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to introduce regulations revising the orange badge scheme.

Mr. Chope: I wish to see agreements among user groups before making any decision on the orange badge scheme.

I will then bring forward the necessary amending regulations.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to discourage local authorities from establishing local schemes which undermine the national nature of the orange badge scheme.

Mr. Chope: I hope that the introduction of a new passport-style badge will be a significant aid to enforcement which will discourage local authorities from setting up their own schemes.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the current repairs and maintenance work on the Severn bridge to be completed; and when the bridge will become fully operational.

Mr. Chope: The resurfacing contract is due for completion in the late summer, when the bridge will be fully operational in its final configuration.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the original estimated cost of the current repairs and maintenance work on the Severn bridge; and what is the latest estimated cost.

Mr. Chope: The current estimated cost of the repair and strengthening work is £80 million. The estimates have been revised many times over the years as changes to the scope of work have become necessary and an original estimated cost on a comparable basis with the current estimate is not available.

Motorway Safety

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the chevron marking of motorways for safety purposes is being considered for the road network as a whole; and whether road safety research carried out by other European countries is made available across the EC.

Mr. Chope: We are currently experimenting with chevron markings on motorways. That trial is due to end in the summer and we shall then consider the research report. The trial is based on French work, the results of which was made available to us prior to our own trials. Further work was considered necessary to see if the chevrons would be successful in different conditions.

There is no formal arrangement for the transfer of road safety research results within the EC on such matters, but information is readily shared in practice.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of motorway warning lights in fog.

Mr. Chope: The matrix signs that are installed on most of the motorway network can indicate temporary speed restrictions and lane closures. They are activated by the police. The advice given to all police forces by the Association of Chief Police Officers is that they should be used only for hazards which are not readily apparent to drivers, and not for generally adverse weather conditions. I am arranging to discuss this policy with the association.

Fog detectors linked automatically to warning signs that display the legend "fog" are under evaluation on the M25. The lessons to be learned from this trial will be applied to other parts of the motorway network.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to vary speed limits on motorways in adverse weather conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Provision is being made in the Road Traffic Bill for the introduction of mandatory variable speed limits. Once the necessary signal technology has been developed and tested this will offer the potential for signing mandatory lower speed limits on motorways in adverse weather conditions as well as in other circumstances.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to modernise or improve the warning light systems on Britain's motorways.

Mr. Chope: A new signalling system combining an improved matrix signal with a supporting variable message sign is being installed on the south-west quadrant of the M25 during the next 12 months. This advanced signalling system will inform drivers of the nature of problems before they are encountered. It is planned that these signs will become automatically operated to give the earliest possible warning of problems or delays.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the motorway warning light system which operates in Holland; and how this compares with the British system.

Mr. Chope: Officials of the Department have visited the Netherlands and had discussions about signalling practices. The Dutch motorway warning light system uses a matrix signal similar to that used in England. The system is concentrated on motorways in urban areas and is automatically operated. In England more than 97 per cent. of the motorway network is fitted with matrix warning systems, 100 km are automatically operated, the rest are operated by the police.

Departmental Property

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 26 July 1990, if his Department has updated figures on the number of properties owned and administered by his Department *(a)* empty for more than six months or *(b)* empty for more than one year; and what is the regional distribution of these properties.

Mr. Chope: At 30 September 1990 the Department owned 2,339 residential properties acquired in advance of requirements for the trunk road programme. The Department's policy is not to leave properties empty if they are to be retained for six months or more and a tenant can be found. The table sets out the information that is available in the same form as the earlier reply.

Analysis of empty property total

	Total stock	*Empty*	*Being sold*	*Repair/ relet in progress*	*Awaiting demolition*	*Awaiting decision*
South Eastern	271	154	24	90	1	39
South Western	98	23	17	3	1	2
West Midlands	143	48	12	24	4	8
North Western	385	50	16	18	8	8
Northern	29	1	0	1	0	0
Yorkshire and Humberside	55	12	8	2	0	2
East Midlands	43	16	9	3	0	4
Eastern	362	60	9	0	43	8
London	953	128	50	11	35	32
TOTAL	2,339	492	145	152	92	103

Poynton Bypass

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what routes he is considering for the A523 Poynton bypass; and when he expects to make a decision.

Mr. Chope: Options based on the orange and green routes passing to the west of Poynton and combining with the eastern section of the proposed A6(M) to M56 (Manchester airport) link are being considered.

I hope to announce a preferred route within the next few weeks.

Roads, Leicestershire

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on new roads in north-west Leicestershire since 1979.

Mr. Chope: Since 1979 the Department of Transport and Leicestershire county council have to date spent £85·25 million on the construction of new trunk and principal roads in north-west Leicestershire. The details are as follows:

Scheme	*Authority*	*Cost £ million*
A50 Coleville relief road stages 1 and 2	Leicestershire County Council	1·636
A50 Coleville relief road stage 3	Leicestershire County Council	1·721
A453 Dualling	Department of Transport	1·500
A42 Measham and Ashby bypass	Department of Transport	35·500
A42 Castle Donington (N) section contract 1	Department of Transport	29·011
A42 Castle Donington (W) section contract 2	Department of Transport	13·140

Scheme	Authority	Cost £ million
A42 Castle Donington (N) section contract 3	Department of Transport	[1]72·742
		85·250

[1] Spend to date (under construction).

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* the major new schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant for 1990-91 and 1991-92 giving in each case *(a)* the net present value, *(b)* the present value or cost and *(c)* the base year used in calculating the net present value and the present value or cost.

Mr. Chope: The information provided by the local highway authorities concerned is as follows:

Major new schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant in 1991-92

Authority	Scheme	(a) NPV	(b) PVC	(c) Base
Berkshire	Phase 2 A33 relief road Rose Kiln Lane to I.D.R.	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Sussex	East Hoathly bypass	11·492	1·964	88
Hampshire	Totton western bypass (Stage 3)	43·612	12·836	88
Kent	Roydon Hall bends to A26	3·476	0·960	88
West Sussex	Hooklands improvement	9·407	2·912	88
Cornwall	Poenryn and Falmouth distributor road	9·460	6·802	88
Devon	Jetty Marsh ST2/Newton Abbot TC schemes	15·970	1·759	88
Devon	A380 relief road (Kerswell to Hele road)	15·924	1·011	88
Dorset	West Stafford bypass	0·927	1·402	88
Gloucestershire	Eastington-Stroud ST2 (Stonehouse Court—Horsetrough Junction)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Somerset	Shepton Mallet to East of Dean	1·597	4·448	88
Wiltshire	Trowbridge relief road—Stage 2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Herefordshire/Worcestershire	Alvechurch bypass	17·130	2·014	79
Shropshire	Newport bypass	5·445	3·404	88
Staffordshire	Keele bypass	2·073	1·611	88
Stockport	A34 bypass (Etchells road to Schools Hill)	1·080	3·260	79
Cheshire	Handforth BP & Maelr (Stockport/Developer funded)	93·081	20·400	88
Cheshire	Urban traffic control system (Chester Warrington)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cumbria	Rothay link	1·274	1·414	88
Cleveland	Portrack Lane dualling	19·600	3·522	88
Durham	Teesside link and airport access	9·964	4·810	88
Durham	Darlington cross town route Stage 1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Humberside	Leven bypass	5·233	6·408	88
North Yorkshire	Ripon BP/Distributor roads and works in city centre	17·713	4·880	88
Leicestershire	Hinckley northern perimeter completion	7·928	1·360	88
Lincolnshire	Grantham inner relief road	1·744	1·390	88
Northamptonshire	Brackley southern bypass	10·900	1·400	88
Buckinghamshire	A509/A422 Newport Pagnell BP dualling (MKDC CON)	8·580	1·847	89
Essex	Stanford-le-Hope to Five Bells Stage 2	110·544	13·058	n/a
Norfolk	King's Lynn traffic management scheme	n/a	n/a	n/a
Norfolk	Stratton Strawless-Hevingham improvement	1·645	0·925	79
Barking	Beacontree Heath road improvements	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bromley	Elmers End road railway bridge	2·810	2·360	88
Ealing	Iron bridge highway improvement	21·159	1·821	88
Hillingdon	Uxbridge town centre improvement scheme	34·600	4·700	88

(a) The net present value (£ million)
(b) The present value of cost (£ million)
(c) The base year.

Major new schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant in 1990-91

Authority	Scheme	(a) NPV	(b) PVC	(c) Base
Berkshire	Sandhurst Crowthorne bypass	27·884	5·800	88
Berkshire	Slough Bath Road Montem Lane—Wellington Street	11·114	4·985	88
East Sussex	Boarshead to Eridge	10·013	5·750	88
Hampshire	M3 link Minley	45·663	5·523	88
Kent	Dartford northern bypass	68·312	6·000	88
Kent	Thames-side industrial route (TIR) stage 1	21·292	2·580	88
Oxfordshire	Banbury inner relief road	37·360	11·750	88
West Sussex	Littlehampton bypass (main scheme)	24·708	4·000	88
West Sussex	Crawley south western bypass	15·067	2·405	88
Avon	Avon ring road (IV): Marsham way-A4 Bath road	6·400	4·190	79
Avon	Weston Super Mare PDR stages VA and VB	3·886	4·380	79
Cornwall	Liskeard industrial distributor road	5·560	3·303	79
Devon	Milehouse junction improvement Plymouth	28·603	1·766	88
Devon	Torbay ring road stage 2	34·836	3·491	88
Devon	Thorns Cross to Eagle Farm stage 4	6·806	3·758	88

Authority	Scheme	(a) NPV	(b) PVC	(c) Base
Devon	Western approach/Union Street junction improvement Plymouth	34·170	0·839	88
Dorset	Primary network/A37 improvement-section A AIP	0·076	1·148	79
Somerset	Lysander road to Hendford Yeovil	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wiltshire	Swindon Cricklade road relief road-stage 2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wiltshire	Burbage bypass	2·581	1·843	88
Birmingham	Middle ring road (Lawley street viaduct section)	4·429	4·965	88
Birmingham	Lichfield road improvement phase 1 (UDA scheme)	66·165	7·700	88
Birmingham	UDA Spine road (Heartlands)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Coventry	North-south road phase 1	28·433	6·166	86
Dudley	Dudley southern bypass	59·300	34·900	88
Solihull	Shirley junction improvements phase 1	3·248	0·967	88
Herefordshire/Worcestershire	Roman road Hereford phase 4 stage 2	−0·252	1·139	88
Herefordshire/Worcestershire	A44-A422 Link Worcester road—Whittington road Marl. Bank	71·260	1·054	88
Shropshire	Ironbridge bypass extension	3·746	1·156	88
Staffordshire	Burslem town centre bypass	0·468	1·304	88
Bolton	Outer ring road improvements	20·527	0·672	79
Manchester	Intrmed ring road stage 1 (Kirkmanshulme Lane-Pottery Lane)	11·617	1·336	79
Manchester	Airport access roads stage 2 (M56 spur/Airport)	1·804	1·660	79
Manchester	Intermediate ring road stage 2 (Pottery lane-Oldham road)	6·789	3·256	79
Stockport	Brinksway improvement phase 2	4·160	2·600	88
Wigan	Lowton St. Mary's bypass	2·610	1·480	79
Knowsley	M57—A562 link road	20·620	30·370	88
Liverpool	Great Howard street improvement phase 1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cheshire	Wilmslow local bypass	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire	Blackburn inner relief road (phase 1)	13·892	3·180	88
Lancashire	Squires gate lane Blackpool dualling	6·374	1·440	88
Lancashire	Park road/St. Helens road link Ormskirk	7·602	1·408	88
Sunderland	Eastern relief road	7·638	0·945	79
Cleveland	Thornaby bypass	18·760	13·500	86
Durham	Metal bridge to Bowburn	3·518	1·158	88
Durham	Consett bypass stage II	n/a	a/a	n/a
Northumberland	Prudhoe northern bypass	23·182	6·479	88
Northumberland	Swinburne quarry to Fourlaws stage 1	1·308	0·729	88
Sheffield	Penistone road stages II and III	4·775	1·377	79
Sheffield	Outer ring road Darnall street II, III and IV	0·206	2·500	79
Bradford	Bradford city ring road stage II	71·924	6·416	88
Bradford	Killinghall Triangle	30·547	0·739	88
Leeds	Leeds inner ring road stages 6 and 7	n/a	n/a	n/a
North Yorkshire	Sherburn-in-Elmet and South Milford bypass	7·358	7·428	88
Leicestershire	Ashby-Loughborough Coleorton improvement	0·178	0·461	79
Leicestershire	Redland quarry to Quorn/Montsorrel bypass link	0·264	0·600	79
Northamptonshire	Middleton Cheney BP and Overthorpe Hall improvement	13·753	5·518	88
Northamptonshire	River Tove bends	2·664	1·645	88
Northamptonshire	Nene valley way I Crawler lane	1·384	0·699	88
Nottinghamshire	Manvers street link Nottingham	3·781	1·448	79
Bedfordshire	Stagsden bypass	1·157	1·836	88
Cambridgeshire	A14/A603/B1042 junction improvement Arrington	n/a	n/a	88
Essex	Dovercourt bypass stage 2 phase 2	2·881	3·420	79
Essex	Canes lane improvement (final stage)	1·837	0·599	79
Norfolk	Watton inner relief road	5·937	1·333	79
Suffolk	Stowmarket relief road	10·144	9·336	88
Suffolk	Mutford bridge	0·545	5·625	88
Croydon	Mitcham road/Sumner road-junction improvement	1·040	1·190	89
Ealing	South road pedestrianisation (Southall town centre)	1·620	2·360	88
Merton	Beddington/Mitcham relief road	59·754	6·644	79
Wandsworth	Battersea park road (Alexandra avenue-Queenstown road)	n/a	1·617	89

(a) The net present value (£ million)
(b) The present value of cost (£ million)
(c) The base year

Toll Road, Cheshire

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the alternative routes for the proposed toll road parallel to the M6 through Cheshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Four groups responded to our invitation for outline proposals for new privately funded road capacity between Birmingham and Manchester. We are still discussing with the respondents aspects of their proposals, which remain commercially confidential.

Gulf Marine Environment

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the work of his marine pollution control unit in relation to the Gulf.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine pollution control unit (MPCU) has contributed to the response to the Gulf oil spill in a variety of ways in conjunction with the Department of the Environment (DOE) which has led on behalf of the Government.

In response to a Saudi Arabian request on 27 January the MPCU facilitated the movement of 90 tonnes of oil containment booms and skimmers from the commercial oil spill service centre at Southampton to Dhahran in Ministry of Defence chartered freight aircraft on 28, 29 and 30 January.

On 28 January the Saudi Arabian Government requested the provision by the United Kingdom of two counter-pollution experts to assist their meteorology and environmental protection administration in responding to the spill. These were immediately provided by the MPCU —one MPCU scientist and another contracted by the MPCU from the DTI Warren Spring laboratory. After the necessary inoculations and training in personal anti-chemical warfare protection the experts arrived in Dhahran on 31 January. They assisted in the creation of a counter-pollution command and control organisation, checked and advised on the boom protection of seawater intakes to desalination plants and important economic sites, and advised on the identification and protection of important coastal ecological sites including plans to be implemented as equipment was made available. On-site reports relayed by these experts direct to the MPCU and thence to the DOE have provided a source of detailed information on the slick and the response to it which has been of great value to the assessment by the Government of the overall situation.

On completion of the initial phase, these scientists were replaced on 15 February by the MPCU chief scientist to provide advice on the selection of disposal sites for recovered oil, spill movement prediction, and the short and long-term recovery of contaminated shores. In response to a request for assistance by the Bahraini Government he also visited Bahrain, to advise on ways in which Her Majesty's Government could help in the event that the oil might reach the Bahraini coast. This led to the gift by Her Majesty's Government of specialist oil recovery equipment —recommended by the MPCU—to the Government of Bahrain. On completion of these tasks and after agreement with the Saudi Arabian authorities, he returned to the United Kingdom on 1 March.

Since 29 January the MPCU has also acted as the co-ordination centre for commercial offers of counter-pollution personnel and equipment from British companies to assist with the oil spill. These have been passed on, as appropriate, to Gulf states via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), which has been asked by the Saudi Arabian Government to act as a clearing house for all international offers of this kind.

The MPCU has provided technical advice to DOE throughout the incident and more recently, the unit has also advised IMO on various clean-up strategies which have been proposed by the Saudi Arabian control centre and which might be supported by the IMO fund to which Her Majesty's Government have contributed £1 million.

Coach Bans, Pimlico

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress of the implementation of the coach ban in parts of Pimlico, as agreed by his Department in accordance with the submission of Westminster city council; when the ban will be introduced; how many signs are needed; what these will cost; and who will pay for them.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* The implementation of the area coach ban and the associated costs are matters for Westminster city council. The Department's approval for a coach ban in the Victoria/Belgravia/Bayswater/Sussex Gardens/Bryanston areas which was required under the Local Government Act 1985 because of the potential effect on traffic flow in the strategic road network, was given on 16 October 1990.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

18. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce his alternative proposals for agriculture reform to those proposed by the European Commission.

Mr. Gummer: I have set out on a number of occasions the objectives we are pursuing in negotiations on the reform of the CAP.

24. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on any official proposals from the European Commission and member Governments to reform the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) earlier today.

25. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the budget estimate for EC spending on agriculture in 1991, expressed in pounds sterling; and if he will make a statement outlining the legal and administrative procedures for preventing overruns in this area of spending.

Mr. Gummer: The Community agriculture budget for 1991 totals £24,240 million excluding the monetary reserve. All Community expenditure is subject to controls under Council decision 88/377 concerning budgetary discipline and any increase in budget provisions requires the approval of the Council and the European Parliament. Furthermore, there are specific procedures in the budget discipline decision to ensure that the agricultural guideline for market support of £22,656 million in 1991 is respected.

Imported Wild Birds

19. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's actions to reduce the mortality of imported wild birds.

Mr. Maclean: The Ministry's second report on mortalities in imported captive birds, relating to imports in 1989, was published in February. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I regard the level of mortality as unacceptably high and the Department is taking what action it can to reduce losses. During the past year veterinary officials have visited major exporting countries and more visits are to take place. We insist that the authorities responsible for exports must comply with our import requirements and observe welfare standards of the International Air Transport Association. Consideration is being given to revised

pre-export isolation and certification requirements, and we will prohibit imports of birds from any country that fails to co-operate.

Following a review of quarantine standards the number of birds in each quarantine premises will be specified according to physiological and behavioural needs. These measures are expected to result in reduced consignment sizes, and from 1 April the maximum size of any consignment of non-psittacines will be reduced from 6,000 to 4,000. Applicants for import licences are also now required to provide more detailed information and we are considering tightening further the application of our disease control arrangements.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is also considering what action can be taken within his responsibilities.

Many of the problems arising from this trade would be significantly reduced if the public did not purchase captive birds. Some species should not be taken from the wild for this trade, and nobody should contemplate buying or keeping birds unless proper care and facilities are available.

Fishing Industry

20. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the eight-day tie-up regulations affecting the fishing industry.

Mr. Curry: The regulations were thoroughly debated on 5 March, and I have nothing to add.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to ensure the accurate reporting of fish catches in area VIIA in the Irish sea.

Mr. Curry: Accurate reporting of fish catches, whether in area VIIA or elsewhere is primarily a matter for individual fishermen. The Government's role is to check the accuracy of such reports by means of spot checks and by comparing them with other data, including data from surface and aerial surveillance. When discrepancies are suspected they are investigated with a view to legal proceedings. In 1990 there were 92 prosecutions on United Kingdom vessels for offences against the control regulation (Council regulation 2241/87) which governs the recording of fishing activity and catches.

Wheat

21. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current intervention stocks of wheat held in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: A table setting out intervention stock levels in the EC and the United Kingdom is deposited monthly in the House of Commons Library. Latest figures were tabled on 12 March.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average ex-farm price of wheat received by *(a)* British farmers, *(b)* French farmers, *(c)* German farmers and *(d)* the EEC generally in 1979, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 in pounds sterling.

Mr. Curry: The information requested by my hon. Friend is not yet published for 1990. The information for the other years is set out in the table. Producer prices for the European Community as a whole are not available.

Producer prices for wheat

£ tonne[1]

	France	*Germany*	*United Kingdom*[2]
1979	91·51	117·70	96·90
1984	98·48	123·90	113·90
1985	96·06	111·24	111·80
1986	114·73	129·25	110·70
1987	113·82	134·74	111·20
1988	98·48	116·40	106·90
1989	101·57	113·67	108·80

[1]Exchange rates based on average spot rates for calendar years.
[2]To facilitate comparisons between countries figures for the United Kingdom are prepared on a slightly different basis from those given in my answer to the hon. Member on 15 March 1991.
Source: "Eurostat Agricultural Prices"

Sugar Beet Quotas

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from the National Farmers Union in respect of sugar beet quotas.

Mr. Curry: None.

Food Prices

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the comparable increase in the price of food to consumers as measured against the retail prices index since 1979.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) earlier today.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what change in retail food prices there has been for each of the last three months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Food prices are leading the way to lower inflation. The rate of food price inflation fell from 6·9 per cent. in November to 6·6 per cent. in December and 5·9 per cent. in January.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he has introduced to the set-aside scheme since its initial introduction.

Mr. Curry: Several changes have been introduced for the third year of the set-aside scheme in particular to improve its impact upon the environment:

The number of cuts required of the plant cover on fallow set-aside land has been increased from one to two;

The list of environmental features which farmers have to maintain and protect on set-aside land has been extended;

A limited grazed fallow option has been included;

The rates of aid for permanent and rotational fallow have been increased, partly to offset the increased costs arising from the new management rules;

Differential rates of aid have been introduced for farmers who fallow more than 100 hectares of land and more than 75 per cent. of their eligible area, in order to reflect better the fixed cost savings.

Other changes have also been made to the scheme in the light of experience of its first two years of operation.

Knacker Industry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the knacker industry; and what representations he has received from United Kingdom knackermen and knackerwomen.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a number of representations from the knacker industry, which remains an important part of our animal waste disposal system. That is why we fought so hard and succeeded in securing arrangements under new Community rules on animal waste disposal which will ensure that the industry will be able to continue in its present form at least until 1995 and even after that if agreement can be reached.

Farm Rents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average farm rent in pounds per acre in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England for each year since 1979.

Mr. Curry: The table gives average farm rents in metric terms for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* England. Information cannot be provided on a United Kingdom basis because Northern Ireland's land tenure system is not generally comparable with that of Great Britain.

Average farm rents (£ per hectare)

Year	Great Britain	England
1979	38·23	42·13
1980	45·27	50·01
1981	52·91	58·36
1982	60·39	66·14
1983	67·70	73·93
1984	74·37	81·27
1985	79·83	87·38
1986	84·41	92·65
1987	87·32	95·86
1988	88·36	96·82
1989	89·19	97·12
[1]1990	90·90	98·48

[1] Provisional.

Bread

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been *(a)* the price of bread and *(b)* the price of wheat in each of the last three years; and what have been the annual increases in real, actual and percentage terms.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	Bread				Wheat		
	Average price[1]	Index	Annual change[2]		Average price[4]	Annual change	
			Nominal terms	Real terms[3]		Nominal terms	Real terms[3]
	p/loaf	January 1987 = 100	Percentage	Percentage	£ tonne	Percentage	Percentage
1988	46·3	107·9	6·7	1·7	105·1	−6·2	−10·6
1989	48·8	114·1	5·7	−1·9	104·7	−0·4	−7·6
1990	50·1	121·0	6·0	−3·0	[5]109·5	+4·6	−4·5

[1] White sliced loaf 800g, annual average of monthly prices.
[2] The percentage change is based on the index rather than the price for bread. This takes into account the fact that the specification of the item may have changed over the period.
[3] Deflated using the all items Retail Price Index.
[4] Average price realised by producers, net of coresponsibility levy.
[5] Forecast.
Sources: Retail Price Index, CSO.
Agriculture in the United Kingdom, MAFF.

Farming Subsidies

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about subsidies available to pig farmers and horticultural farmers in the Netherlands which are available through *(a)* the European Community and *(b)* the Dutch Government; whether those in *(a)* are available in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: European Community price support arrangements for pigmeat and for horticultural products apply in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The Government do not keep comprehensive details of the national subsidies and other state aids available to farmers in the Netherlands and other member states, since to do so would not be a cost effective use of resources. All state aids are, however, subject to the provisions of articles 92 to 94 of the treaty of Rome, and member states are required to obtain the Commission's approval in advance for new state aids and modifications to existing aids and to send an inventory of all state aids to the Commission annually. The Government monitor, through their embassies in the Netherlands and elsewhere, the introduction of new state aids and modifications to existing aids, and draw any that seem to be of doubtful legality to the attention of the Commission.

Green Pound

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the different green pound rates operative in various agricultural commodities and each individual rate for each type of cereals and other crops listed under cropping in the annual review of agriculture White Paper for *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Northern Ireland and *(c)* the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is set out in the table:

Commodity	Green rate [1]United Kingdom	[2]Republic of Ireland
All crop products	0·779553	0·878776
Sheepmeat	0·779553	0·878776
Beef and veal	0·795232	0·878776
Pigmeat	0·800520	0·878776
All other products	0·758185	0·878776

[1] 1 ECU in £ sterling.
[2] 1 ECU in Irish punt.

Source: EC Commission.

Animal Medicines

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the levels of fees for licensing animal medicines in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the other countries of the European Community.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is set out in the table. This is based on information circulated by the EC Commission in November 1990 to provide an approximate estimate of the fees payable in each member state. The pound sterling rates have been converted from ECUs at the rate prevailing on 30 November 1990.

Fees payable for authorisation of veterinary medicinal products in EC member states: 1990-91

Country	Product with new active ingredient (£)	Product with established active ingredient (£)
Belgium	1,079	1,079
Denmark	1,915	1,915
Germany	8,202	2,563
Greece	204	204
Spain	8	8
France	155	155
Ireland	1,468	296
Italy	525	525
Luxembourg	49	49
Netherlands	834	303
Portugal	310	310
United Kingdom	12,000	3,000

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make it his policy to limit the increase in fees for licensing animal medicines to the level of inflation.

Mr. Maclean: No. Government policy remains that the full cost of licensing should be recovered from the industry through the fees it pays for licences and other services. Costs will continue to be reviewed annually and, where necessary, any increases will be reflected in the fees charged. But with improvements in efficiency at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate resulting from its establishment as a "next steps" agency, I would expect any increases that may arise to be kept below the level of inflation as is the case this year. Proposals currently before the House for 1991-92 are for an increase of 5 per cent. in fees for product licences and animal test certificates, and an average of 8 per cent. for other fees and inspections. Both are well below the current rate of inflation.

Equine Population

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he estimates to be the equine population *(a)* currently and *(b)* five, 10, 15 and 20 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: No official figures are available for the total equine population, but the department periodically collects information on horses kept on agricultural holdings in England and Wales. Figures for the years of collection giving the nearest match to the years requested, are shown in the following table:

Horses kept on agricultural holdings in England and Wales

	1970	1975	1979	1983	1990
(i) Horses for agricultural and horticultural purposes	[1]12,000	4,100	4,400	5,400	5,200
(ii) All other horses and ponies	114,000	144,000	132,000	144,000	138,000
Totals	126,000	148,100	136,400	149,400	143,200

[1] Collected in 1970 as: Horses (including mares kept for breeding) used for work in agriculture or market gardening.
Note: All figures include estimates for minor holdings.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to recommend to farmers non-organophosphorous sheep dips; how many complaints his Department has received about damages to humans using the present dips; and when he expects to approve further alternative preparations.

Mr. Maclean: I am not taking any steps at this stage to recommend that farmers use one type of sheep dip rather than another. All sheep dip products are currently subject to a review to ensure the most up-to-date safety standards apply. Any products which fail to meet these standards will have to be withdrawn from the market. The results of the review will be announced later this year.

Of the 55 reports of suspected adverse reactions I reported in my reply to my hon. Friend on 11 March at column 399, 41 relate to dips which are presently licensed. That is nine reports fewer than previously indicated. I regret that the expiry of two product licences, for which the nine reports were received, had been overlooked.

I will be happy to approve any alternative preparations which meet the Medicines Act criteria of safety, quality and efficacy.

Consumer Representatives

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with consumer representatives.

Mr. Maclean: Representatives of the consumer organisations were present on the 20 February 1991, at the fourth periodic meeting between my right hon. Friend the Minister and the office holders of consumer organisations. The next meeting is planned for 25 June 1991.

Bovine Somatotropin

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of farms, their locations, the number of cows and which companies are licensed for the testing of bovine somatotropin in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Cyanamid, Lilly Industries and Monsanto are currently authorised to conduct field trials using BST products. Trials involving 70 cows are currently taking place on three farms in the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member is already aware, section 118 of the Medicines Act precludes me from disclosing further details.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Veterinary Products Committee is to consider the possible adverse effects of bovine somatotropin on the human stomach; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The VPC considered this aspect in relation to two BST products before advising me last year that their use would pose no risk to human safety. I assume that the hon. Member is referring to a recent article on this subject in the *British Medical Journal*. I am asking the VPC to consider this paper in case it contains new data which they will wish to assess.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he now intends to allow the introduction of bovine somatotropin; whether the Veterinary Products Committee has considered the matter further; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The VPC has advised me that applications from Lilly Industries and Monsanto to license BST products should be refused for reasons of animal safety. Both companies have said they will be taking up their right to appeal to the Medicines Commission and to generate additional data for consideration there. I certainly do not intend to license any BST product while these expert committees continue to advise me not to.

Fish Products

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to amend the ingredients regulations concerning fish products.

Mr. Maclean: I have just issued for public consultation proposals for new controls on fish products. The main provisions of the proposals:

(a) require all fish products as defined to be labelled with a declaration of the average fish content;
(b) require a declaration of the presence of minced fish if present in amounts greater than 10 per cent. of the total fish content; and
(c) define the term 'fillet' and permit its use in labelling and advertising to indicate its proportion in the final product.

Once enacted, the proposal will also revoke the Food Standards (Fish Cakes) Order 1950.

Cattle

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the reasons for the imposition of the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Lead in Cattle) (England) Order 1991 which was made on 6 March, giving the origins of the contamination and the number of cattle involved; and whether he expects an increase in the number of farms affected.

Mr. Gummer: These restrictions were introduced by an order made under part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to protect consumers by preventing the marketing of contaminated food following an outbreak of lead poisoning among a group of 80 dairy cattle on a farm in Devon. The source of contamination has been traced to an old car battery which had been inadvertently incorporated into a silage clamp. No other farms are affected.

Pollution Control

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that in the case of pollution control projects, grant aid approval will not be refused to farmers who have set about urgent remedial works, eligible for grant, in response to requests from the National Rivers Authority or any other regulatory authority.

Mr. Curry: It has always been our policy to pay grant on claims which comply with the terms of the relevant grant scheme.

Farm Conservation Grants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many grant applications under the farm aid conservation grant scheme have been refused in the last two years; and for what reasons applications were refused in each case.

Mr. Curry: In England, since the farm and conservation grant scheme was introduced in February 1989, a total of 653 claims have been rejected or withdrawn and 6,626 claims authorised for payment up to the end of February 1991. Claims will have been rejected for a breach of either the statutory requirements or the administrative rules of the scheme. Reasons for rejections in individual cases could be given only at disproportionate cost as this information is not held centrally.

DEFENCE

Hunting

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a licence has been issued to the Bicester with Whaddon Chase foxhounds to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Arncott near Bicester in Oxfordshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a licence issued to a hunt to hunt on Ministry of Defence land has ever been revoked or if action has been taken for infringement of licensing conditions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No licence to hunt on Ministry of Defence land has been revoked for breach of the licence conditions. There have been two occasions in the last five years when hunts have been warned about the conduct of themselves or their followers.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the licence fee for hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land becomes payable in 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1991]*: There is no specific date in the year for payment of licence fees for hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land. Licences with hunts commence on different dates in the year and payment is required at the start of the licence period and before the hunt enters MOD land.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hunts that had a licence to hunt on Ministry of Defence land have not fully paid the licence fee for 1990 by the end of the year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1991]*: There are no outstanding licence fees in respect of 1990 for hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land.

Missiles

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Kingswood of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *412*, on the "Family of Weapons Memorandum of Understanding", if he will identify the factors which have given rise to the need to reconsider the status of the MOU with the United States Government.

Mr. Alan Clark: The principal factors relate to changes in the international situation since the MOU was signed in 1980, and to progress made in developing the two weapon systems involved.

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer to the hon. Member for Kingswood of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *412*, when the review of BAe's ASRAAM proposal will be complete.

Mr. Alan Clark: Any proposal made by BAe in response to the invitation to tender for solutions to SR(A)1234 will be evaluated along with other proposals received. It is too early to say when these evaluations will be complete.

Christmas Islands

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who were present at Christmas island during nuclear tests are *(a)* still living and *(b)* deceased.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Data on mortality amongst nuclear test participants up to 1 January 1989 is still being verified by the National Radiological Protection Board. Its report on this study will not be available for some time.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what documents relating to British nuclear tests have been released under sections 3(4) and 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958; what documents have been withheld; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Listings of documents related to the British nuclear weapons tests and experiments, whether released or withheld on grounds of national security under the Public Records Act 1958, could not be compiled and published without disproportionate cost.

Gulf War (Casualties)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has informed Gulf support groups that casualty visiting officers will make special arrangements, including payment of allowances and travel costs, for nominated next of kin to visit hospitalised casualties from the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Next of kin of hospitalised personnel were informed by service authorities of the special arrangements for visiting their relatives, including eligibility for concessionary travel and subsistence allowances. It was not necessary to inform Gulf support groups separately of the arrangements, although advice was provided on request.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the nominated next of kin of the very seriously ill, the seriously ill and other hospitalised casualties following the Gulf war have been granted allowances for full board and lodgings and travel costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost and effort.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the forces returning from the Gulf required or are likely to require hospitalisation; and how many of these have been classified as very seriously ill or seriously ill.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: To date a total of 811 service personnel requiring hospitalisation have returned from the Gulf during operation Granby. Information on the numbers of very seriously ill or seriously ill cases is collected on a daily basis, not as a running total. There were 10 seriously ill and no very seriously ill cases in United Kingdom military hospitals yesterday.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Her Majesty's special armed forces suffered any casualties as a result of participation in operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Four members of the special forces were killed in action.

Gulf Trust

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he has given any advice to service benevolent funds regarding the distribution of money raised by the Gulf Trust; if the service benevolent funds have given him any information regarding money so far allocated; and on what criteria allocations are being made;

(2) how much money has so far been donated to the Gulf Trust; how much has been allocated to the benevolent fund for each service; and on what criteria the allocation was made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total value of donations to the Gulf Trust currently stands at £1·2 million. Allocations from the trust to the service benevolent funds will be made in accordance with needs. No allocations have yet been made. The service benevolent funds will distribute moneys to those in need in accordance with their established practices and within the ambit of their trust deeds.

The Gulf (Camels)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of camels *(a)* killed by allied bombing raids or ground attacks in Iraq and Kuwait and *(b)* that have died of asphyxiation from smoke from the burning oil wells in Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

The Gulf (Army Personnel)

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if British Army personnel serving in the open desert in the Gulf are being charged for their food and accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All Army personnel serving in the desert are exempt from food and accommodation charges.

Fissile Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been undertaken by or on behalf of, his Department concerning the long-term verifiable storage or destruction of fissile materials withdrawn from redundant nuclear warheads.

Mr. Alan Clark: None.

The Gulf (Smoke)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make a statement on the work of the Meteorological Office research aircraft in studying the composition and behaviour of smoke plumes in the Gulf.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The C-130 aircraft of the meteorological research flight is owned and crewed by the RAF. It has been fitted out with a wide range of sophisticated scientific instruments which are operated by Meteorological Office scientists who direct the scientific missions.

The aircraft will conduct a number of flights over the Gulf states before returning to the United Kingdom where the data gathered will be analysed. Measurements will be made of the optical and chemical properities of the oil smoke plume at a number of downwind distances at varying heights. The results will greatly assist the evaluation of the smoke movements and its impact.

Housing Sales

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy regarding the sale of ex-Ministry of Defence housing; and whether any changes have occurred to this policy in the last 10 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* Surplus service married quarters which are capable of individual sale are normally offered for sale to serving service personnel at a 30 per cent. discount. Surplus civilian dwellings which are capable of individual sale are normally offered for sale to the civilian occupant at a discount of up to 60 per cent; the difference in discount follows from the service personnel's discount being taxable whereas the discount available to a civilian is not. As an exceptional measure, civilian tenants of surplus service married quarters may be allowed to purchase at a discount of 30 per cent. Surplus housing which is not offered for sale through either of the two discount schemes is normally sold on the open market to the highest bidder. Exceptionally, private treaty sales—for example to a housing association—may be agreed provided that an open market sale is not likely to achieve a higher price; in such cases the price is determined by the district valuer. Apart from the introduction of the civilian discount scheme in 1980 and the service scheme in 1983, there have been no other changes to our disposal policy in the last 10 years.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 22 March 1991

NORTHERN IRELAND

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Needham: I am responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State both for energy matters, including energy efficiency, and for the environment.

My specific brief on energy efficiency is to promote the continuous implementation of effective energy efficiency measures throughout the Northern Ireland economy. To that end I published an important consultative paper on energy efficiency last December. It promotes energy efficiency in the context of environmental conservation; calls for committed action now by all interested parties; and sets out—by way of example—an extensive range of initiatives being taken by Government including increased financial support for both low-income families and the industrial and commercial sectors. A copy of the consultative paper has been placed in the Library. Responses to the consultative paper are now being analysed and will be reflected in an energy strategy paper to be published later this year.

In the public sector Northern Ireland has had its own inter departmental committee on energy efficiency since 1984. It promotes and co-ordinates public sector initiatives, reports annually to my right hon. Friend and sets targets for continuous improvement. In addition, I represent Northern Ireland on the United Kingdom-wide ministerial group on energy efficiency chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

On 6 March my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland issued a personal message to all public sector employees in Northern Ireland exhorting them to practise energy efficiency not only at work but at home, in their leisure, social and recreational pursuits. My right hon. Friend wishes to be kept informed of progress.

Job Clubs

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will establish a job club in Carrickfergus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: No. There are job clubs in nearby Larne, Newtownabbey and Belfast. Unemployed people who have to travel to make use of job clubs have their fares reimbursed and so are not out of pocket.

Housing

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the number of persons on the waiting list of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for accommodation in Belfast districts 2 and 7 and each housing area in Castlereagh in both 1979 and 1991.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I am advised by its chief executive that the information requested is not available before 1981. However, at the end of February 1981 and February 1991 the number of persons on the waiting list was as follows:

District	*February 1981*	*February 1991*
Belfast 2	1,463	1,036
Belfast 7	1,308	1,184
Castlereagh 1	570	289
Castlereagh 2	1,178	518

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Management of Schools

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the budget allocation per unit for local management of schools in *(a)* Wigston, *(b)* South Wigston and *(c)* Oadby; what is the average budget allocation per unit for schools in the city of Leicester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is not available for Leicestershire as the authority did not operate a scheme for the local management of its schools in the 1990-91 financial year. We do not yet have a copy of the authority's budget statement for 1991-92; it is under a duty to publish that statement by 31 March.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the proportion of children at schools in Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston that come from out of the catchment area; and what consideration he has given to the implications of this on LMS funding to these schools.

Mr. Fallon: The Department has no information on the sources of pupils attending schools in these districts. Under local management of schools, pupils of the same age are funded on the same basis irrespective of their source. If they come from a neighbouring authority, that authority will pay a recoupment charge to the providing authority.

Capital Grants

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from Cleveland county councillors about capital grants for schools.

Mr. Fallon: I met Cleveland's education committee chairman and the chief education officer on 11 March to discuss their ACG allocation for 1991-92.

European Integration

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list *(a)* the new teaching activities in European integration with effect from the

beginning of the 1991-92 academic year and *(b)* the new European chairs financed and supported under the terms of the Jean Monnet project 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The EC has awarded grants under the Jean Monnet project to United Kingdom higher education institutions in support of the following activities:

(a) Permanent courses

1. Bristol Polytechnic; Europe: The Single Market and Beyond;
2. University of Essex; History of European Integration;
3. University of Essex; The External Relations of the Community;
4. University of Ulster; European Integration;
5. University of Ulster; History of European Integration;
6. University of Dundee; The Structure and Operations of the Community;
7. University of Durham; The European Community: an interdisciplinary introduction;
8. University of Glasgow; The impact of European integration on Social Policy;
9. University of Glasgow; Transport, Public Policy and European Integration;
10. Huddersfield Polytechnic; The Economics of European Integration;
11. Liverpool Polytechnic; European Integration;
12. Goldsmith's College, University of London; Economics of the EC;
13. Goldsmith's College, University of London; The Government and Politics of the European Community;
14. Polytechnic of East London; European Integration—from World War II to 1992;
15. University of Manchester; The Economics of European Integration;
16. Nottingham Polytechnic; Economics of the European Community;
17. University of Nottingham; Harmonisation of Law in Europe;
18. University of Oxford; European Social Policy;
19. University of Keele; Prospects for Europe;

European Modules

1. Queen's University of Belfast; The European Community;
2. Anglia Higher Education College; European Integration;
3. North East Wales Institute; Introduction to EC studies;
4. Coventry Polytechnic; Introduction to the EC;
5. Napier Polytechnic; European Studies;
6. Huddersfield Polytechnic; European Community Institutions;
7. University of Hull; European Community Environmental Law;
8. University of Leicester; The Economics of the EC;
9. Polytechnic of Central London; European Studies;
10. Manchester Polytechnic; European Integration—the legal dimension;
11. Staffordshire Polytechnic; European Studies;

(b) European Chairs

1. University College of Wales; Monnet Lectureship in European Integration;
2. University of Birmingham; Lecturer in European Economics;
3. University of Bristol; The Monnet Chair/Lectureship for European Community Studies;
4. University of Hull; "Chair" in European Integration;
5. University of Leicester; Jean Monnet Lecturer in European Community Law;
6. Ealing College of Higher Education; The Jean Monnet Principal Lectureship in Community Studies;
7. University College London; "Chair" in European Economics and Integration;
8. Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic; "Chair" in the Law and Policy of the European Community;
9. University of Salford; Lectureship in the History, Politics and Culture of the EC;
10. University of York; Jean Monnet Senior Lecturer in European Economics;
11. University of Strathclyde; Jean Monnet Chair of European Law.

Teacher Appraisal

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish *(a)* the draft regulations on teacher appraisal and *(b)* the draft circular of guidance on teacher appraisal; if he will list those interested bodies which he intends to consult on both the draft regulations and the draft circular; and if he will indicate how much time will be allowed for such consultations.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to initiate consultations shortly on draft regulations and a draft circular on school teacher appraisal. He intends to allow some four weeks for such consultations and to consult the following bodies.

Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Welsh Joint Education Council
Assistant Masters' and Mistresses' Association
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
National Union of Teachers
Professional Association of Teachers
Secondary Heads Association
Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (National Association of Teachers of Wales)
Catholic Education Council
Free Church Federal Council
General Synod of the Church of England Board of Education
London Board of Jewish Religious Education
Methodist Division of Education and Youth
Grant Maintained Schools
Grant Maintained Schools Trust
National Association of Governors and Managers

Institute Laue-Langevin

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of United Kingdom funding of the Institute Laue-Langevin in Grenoble.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As part of its review of forward commitments, the Science and Engineering Research Council announced on 7 February that it could not continue to support both the Institut Laue-Langevin and the ISIS (RAL) neutron facility at the current levels. To help it take the matter further the council has established a review panel to assess the United Kingdom's requirements for neutrons over the coming years and the most effective way of providing them.

Education Resources

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is taking to ensure that more resources are delegated to schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to his reply, 21 February 1991, Official Report, c. 235-39]:* The national average of responses retained by LEAs on central administration in 1990-91 as a percentage of the potential schools budget should read 4·06 per cent., rather than 5·26 per cent. as quoted in the table at column *238*. The individual LEA figures quoted in the table remain correct.

PRIME MINISTER

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the total amount paid in grants by Government Departments to voluntary bodies during the financial year 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Government funding to voluntary organisations in 1989-90 amounted to £2·36 billion. Of this, £1,681 million was payments to housing associations; £204 million was payments under major employment and training schemes; £373 million went to support provision of services and a wide range of activities and projects by a variety of voluntary organisations. The amount spent under individual departmental programmes is as follows:

	£
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	120,170
Defence	8,148,082
Education and Science	4,751,901
Employment	
Youth training scheme	100,000,000
Employment training	104,000,000
Other programmes	58,078,798
Energy	722,218
Environment	
Direct grants	11,132,402
Urban programme	61,400,000
Housing corporation	1,347,690,000
Countryside Commission	2,107,000
Nature Conservancy Council	1,528,000
Rural Development Commission	4,816,000
Sports Council	15,543,000
UK 2000 project grant fund	336,000
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	1,532,000
Overseas Development Administration	65,164,127
Health	
Direct grants	39,589,458
Health Education Authority	728,043
Home Office	
Direct grants	28,545,000
Equal Opportunities Commission	7,043
Commission for Racial Equality	1,178,722
Lord Chancellor's Department	768,000
Northern Ireland Office	
Direct grants	16,158,488
Housing associations and societies	38,192,981
Economic Development Grants:	
Action for community employment	48,547,471
Community workshops	19,008,115
Community volunteer schemes	868,000
Youth Community project	868,658
Youth Help	793,318
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	507,835
Scottish Office	
Direct grants	16,339,277
Urban programme	34,251,000
Housing associations	202,000,000
Countryside Commission for Scotland	709,798
Highlands and Island Development Board	1,075,485
Sports Council for Scotland	1,386,562
Social Security	3,997,784
Trade and Industry	10,222,771
Transport	576,000
Welsh Office	
Direct grants	7,227,156
Urban programme	4,125,000
Joint Finance/Care in the Community	305,000
Housing associations and societies	93,180,000
Development Board for Rural Wales	372,000
Sports Council for Wales	1,775,600
GRAND TOTAL	2,360,374,263

Excluding payments under major employment and training schemes and to housing association and societies funding has increased in cash terms by 8·3 per cent. over the level of provision in 1988-89. In the period between 1979-80 and 1989-90 the level of this Government's support for voluntary bodies has risen by 114 per cent. in real terms.

I am placing in the Library of the House a list of voluntary bodies funded by Government in 1989-90, other than those funded under the youth training scheme and employment training, housing programmes and the urban programme or via non-departmental public bodies.

Security Commissioner (Report)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Prime Minister when the Commissioner appointed under the Security Service Act 1989 will present his first annual report; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's first annual report, for 1990, has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 4(6) of the Security Service Act 1989. The confidential appendix to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 4(7) of the 1989 Act. I am grateful to the commissioner for his work in reviewing the issue of warrants and note that he is satisfied that the Secretaries of State have properly exercised their powers under the Act.

Troops (Homecoming)

Mr. Mates: To ask the Prime Minister how the Government intend *(a)* to mark the safe homecoming of British troops who contributed to the liberation of Kuwait, *(b)* to pay tribute to those who lost their lives in that cause and *(c)* to honour those who gave gallant and meritorious service.

The Prime Minister: A service of remembrance and thanksgiving will be held in Glasgow cathedral in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen on Saturday 4 May.

The Lord Mayor and the Corporation of London will host a reception at Guildhall on Friday 21 June for members of British forces. It will be preceded by a march through the City at which Her Majesty the Queen will take the salute.

Her Majesty the Queen has approved the award of a Gulf medal for those who served in the region. She has also agreed that there should be a Gulf honours list, to be published at the end of June, for those who displayed gallantry and gave meritorious service.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Carers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he will take to ensure that all full-time carers are granted the right to regular breaks, and that those carers wishing to take up such breaks in the company of their clients are given additional resources.

Mr. Scott: The main social security benefit available to carers is invalid care allowance (ICA). ICA is payable to people who give up the opportunity for full-time work to provide regular and substantial care for a severely disabled person receiving attendance allowance. ICA can remain in payment for up to four weeks in any period of 26 weeks while the carer or the person cared for is on holiday, or the caring role is temporarily suspended for some other reason. Breaks in caring can total as much as 12 weeks in a 26-week period, if the breaks are due to the carer or the disabled person undergoing medical or other treatment as an in-patient in a hospital or similar institution.

Social Security Spending

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount spent on social security in the United Kingdom, in actual and at 1990 prices, for each year since 1978-79; and what was the percentage increase or decrease for each year.

Miss Widdecombe: Details of social security spending in Great Britain are given in the table. Information about social security spending in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Grand total social security spending

£ million

Year (outturn)	*Cash*	*At 1990-91 prices*	*Real terms percentage increase over preceding year*
1978-79	16,602	41,953	—
1979-80	19,616	42,483	1·3
1980-81	23,751	43,469	2·3
1981-82	28,963	48,341	11·2
1982-83	33,000	51,426	6·4
1983-84	36,881	54,933	6·8
1984-85	39,949	56,627	3·1
1985-86	43,488	58,460	3·2
1986-87	46,841	60,886	4·2
1987-88	48,939	60,327	−0·9
1988-89	49,721	57,121	−5·3
1989-90	52,661	56,874	−0·4
1990-91 (estimated)	59,001	59,001	3·7
1991-92 (plans)	66,167	62,422	5·8

Note: Reduction in real terms expenditure for the years 1987-88 and 1989-90 was due to the effect of reduced levels of unemployment.

Unemployment Costs

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total current cost of unemployment to the Exchequer, including benefits, redundancy fund payments, administrative costs, lost revenue and any other identifiable costs.

Mr. Jack: Benefit expenditure on the unemployed is expected to be £4,850 million in 1990-91. The cost of administering unemployment benefit in 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, was £176 million. For other benefits it is not possible to identify separately the administration costs attributable to the unemployed.

Redundancy fund payments are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who advises that in 1990-91 redundancy fund payments totalled £141 million. Estimates of tax revenue forgone are not available.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of people in receipt of cold weather payments in each of the Scottish and English regions and Wales for each of the last five years; and what was the cost of these, by regions.

Mr. Scott: Information on the number of people in receipt of cold weather payments, together with their costs, for the period 1985-89 is available in the Library.

Information for 1989-90 and 1990-91 will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Water Rates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will introduce legislation to provide a water rate rebate system for those on low incomes;

(2) if he will introduce an additional element into the income support system to give extra payments to all persons who have water bills in excess of £50 per adult person in that household.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so. Income-related benefits are intended to cover all normal living expenses, including those for utilities such as water and fuel.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what length of lease is required in the establishment of a care home trust to satisfy his Department that the home is truly independent.

Mr. Scott: In determining entitlement to income support, the adjudication officer has no regard to the length of lease under which the independent home was established.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for income support by residents of care home trusts have so far been refused by his Department; and what were the main reasons for refusal.

Mr. Scott: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether residents of local authority care homes which have been redesignated under schedule 8 of the National Health Service Act 1977 are entitled to claim housing benefit and income support.

Mr Scott: People whose accommodation is provided under this legislation may claim income support up to an amount equivalent to the current basic rate of retirement pension to meet the minimum charge for the accommodation. They are not entitled to housing benefit.

ENERGY

Radioactive Material (Storage)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his present policy in respect of the dry storage of radioactive material.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Other than on licensed nuclear sites, no person shall keep, use or cause or permit to be kept or used, radioactive material unless he is registered under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 or exempted from being so. The storage of all radioactive material on licensed nuclear sites must be approved by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate under the terms of the site licences.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his or her brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Baldry: I have responsibility for energy efficiency within the Department of the Environment.

My aim is to reduce the Department's own energy consumption by 15 per cent. in real terms over the next five years, in line with the target adopted generally for the Government estate. To this end I am encouraging the Department to implement all practicable energy efficiency schemes and to promote staff awareness of the benefits of saving energy.

As part of the Secretary of State's responsibility for environmental policy we aim to increase public awareness of the link between energy efficiency and the threat of climate change due to the greenhouse effect. The Department's leaflet, "Wake up to what you can do for the Environment", published on 4 March, gives advice on improving energy efficiency in the home and on the road.

We are taking specific measures to increase the energy efficiency of the housing stock. Amendments to the Building Regulations which came into effect on 1 April 1990 should achieve a 20 per cent. improvement in the energy efficiency of new houses, and we will monitor them to see how they can be further improved. We will consider how best to develop and encourage the application of energy labelling schemes for buildings, with the intention of incorporating labelling into the Building Regulations. A model developed by DOE's Building Research Establishment is already in use for assessing the energy requirements of housing.

My Department is running the greenhouse demonstration programme to provide examples of effective energy efficiency in local authority housing. General local authority housing repair and maintenance programmes are supplemented by our estate action programme, targeting particularly rundown council estates. Around a quarter of the money spent is on heating and insulation measures. In private sector housing the new home renovation grants regime enables local authorities to help less well-off people in housing which is not energy efficient. A substantial new programme of research will be undertaken into the barriers to increased energy efficiency in the housing stock.

We are also encouraging local authorities to improve the energy efficiency of their own buildings. During May my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside and I will be addressing a series of seminars organised with the energy efficiency office for local government on the environmental and financial benefits of energy efficiency.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the measures he is taking in order to reduce or stabilise carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000.

Mr. Baldry: The Government announced last May that, if other countries take similar action, we will stabilise United Kingdom emissions of carbon dioxide at 1990 levels by 2005. Taking account of our policies on other greenhouse gases, achieving this target would reduce the global warming potential of Britain's emissions to some 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2005. The Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" published last September set out the first tranche of measures that the Government proposed to take to achieve this.

Empty Properties

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties owned by local authorities have stood empty *(a)* for over six months or *(b)* for over one year; how many properties owned and administered by his Department have been vacant (i) for over six months or (ii) for over one year; and what is the regional distribution of these properties.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of their dwellings vacant for between six and 12 months and over a year in their annual housing investment programme returns (HIP1). The latest figures are published in columns A178 (six to 12 months) and col. A188 (over a year) of "1990 HIP1-Regional Grossing", a copy of which is in the Library.

The regional breakdown of Crown freehold properties on the common user estate with at least 90 per cent. vacancy are given below:

Outstation	*Properties vacant for 6 to 12 months*	*Properties vacant for more than a year*
Scotland	—	10
North East	—	1
North West	—	3
Midlands	2	2
Thames North	—	—
Thames South	1	3
Central London	—	1
South West/Wales	4	7
TOTAL	7	27

Housing

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 30 local authorities with the highest generalised needs index private stock indicator scores, giving in each case their respective scores on this indicator and the allocation which each received for specified capital grants in 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Following are the 30 authorities with the highest total of private sector stock condition and private defective dwellings generalised needs index scores:

	Private sector stock condition score	*Defective dwellings score*	*Total*	*Allocation for specified capital grant (£000)*
Birmingham	164·0	82·3	246·4	21,973
Liverpool	66·0	59·7	125·6	7,320
Bristol	68·2	42·8	111·0	10,991
Leeds	72·0	15·3	87·3	7,350
Bradford	65·5	3·3	68·9	3,200
Sheffield	59·7	4·8	64·5	7,400
Manchester	56·8	0·0	56·8	3,405
Sandwell	35·0	20·1	55·1	4,575
Kirklees	54·2	0·3	54·6	4,200
Brent	32·2	17·2	49·4	2,938
Wirral	43·6	4·0	47·6	4,866
Plymouth	32·5	14·2	46·6	3,306
Coventry	43·4	1·2	44·5	3,210
Ealing	37·7	6·1	43·8	3,917
Wolverhampton	28·8	11·9	40·7	3,100
Wakefield	30·4	9·5	40·0	5,117
Sefton	36·5	2·2	38·8	2,000
Stoke-on-Trent	37·9	0·5	38·3	5,135
Calderdale	34·4	1·6	35·9	1,500
Waltham Forest	32·6	2·6	35·2	1,787
Dudley	27·0	6·9	33·9	2,740
Newcastle-under-Lyme	16·3	17·6	33·9	2,814
Walsall	27·0	6·1	33·1	2,891
Kingston upon Hull	29·7	2·4	32·1	4,970
Wigan	27·7	2·6	30·2	1,865
Bolton	30·2	0·0	30·2	3,311
Bournemouth	29·9	0·0	29·9	1,359
Southampton	12·2	17·6	29·8	3,112
Staffordshire Moorlands	13·9	15·7	29·6	2,748
Bromley	21·8	7·6	29·4	2,137

The allocation of resources for specified capital grants is neither a limit nor a target for the level of grants which an authority may receive. It is made partly in relation to needs index scores, but also reflects local authorities' individual needs and circumstances which are taken into account by the Department's regional controllers in recommending the allocation.

District Auditors

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in each of the last three years district auditors have drawn attention in their reports to the costs incurred in answering community charge payers' or ratepayers' questions.

Mr. Key: Such information is not held centrally by either the Department or the Audit Commission.

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will break down the number of urban programme projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year by local authority *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will indicate the percentage of projects not approved for the urban programme 1991-92 relating to *(a)* ethnic minority projects, *(b)* projects relating to disability, *(c)* economic development and *(d)* the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Northampton Employment and Training Unit

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to ensure that the district auditor of Northampton borough council makes public his report into the Northampton employment and training unit.

Mr. Key: Except in certain specified circumstances, the appointed auditor is prohibited by section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 from disclosing information obtained pursuant to his duties, and the Secretary of State has no powers to set aside that prohibition. However, when such a report comes to be formally considered by the authority it will, in effect, be made public under the provisions of section 18(5) of that Act. If the Local Government Finance (Publicity for Auditors' Reports) Bill were to be enacted, auditors' immediate reports in the public interest would be made public immediately upon receipt by the authority.

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes have been sold in the constituency of Leicestershire, North-West including Shepshed.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* Information is not available for sales by parliamentary constituency. A table showing the available information on sales for each

English local authority since April 1979 was recently placed in the Library (*Official Report*, volume 184, column *542*).

Gulf Marine Environment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the interference to *(a)* the feeding habits and *(b)* the breeding patterns of dugongs in the northern Gulf waters arising from (i) the oil slicks discharged from Kuwaiti oil terminals and (ii) the explosion of sea mines.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The assessments available to me indicate that dugongs are vulnerable to damage which oil pollution can cause to the seagrass beds on which they feed in the shallow waters of the western Gulf. I have no information on particular risks to dugongs posed by explosion of mines, but no mortalities have yet been reported. The current location of the spill is to the north of the main dugong habitats.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of the Plymouth marine laboratory of the Natural Environment Research Council in relation to the Gulf.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The Plymouth marine laboratory of NERC has compiled an assessment of the likely biological effects of the Gulf oil spill, copies of which are available in the Library. We are continuing to seek its advice on this topic and to make its expertise and that of other United Kingdom marine environment science bodies known to the Gulf states.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which countries have donated defensive booms for work in the Gulf.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* According to the list provided by the International Maritime Organisation, equipment donated to the Gulf states for preventing oil pollution, recovering oil, or clean-up has so far been provided by Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest information from the International Maritime Organisation on the movement of oil slicks in the Gulf.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The latest reports from the International Maritime Organisation indicate that a large slick remains positioned along the Saudi coast north of Abu Ali island with further patches of light oil between 10 and 60 miles offshore. Small amounts of oil continue to leak into the northern Gulf in Kuwaiti waters.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken to protect the sea grass in the Gulf.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The best prospect for protecting sea grass beds from the effects of the Gulf oil slick is likely to come from rapid recovery operations directed at the remaining oil floating on the surface before it breaks up and sinks. I described to the hon. Member on 15 March at column 1385-86 the UK's contribution to counter-pollution measures in the region.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what requests he has had from Gulf states for monitoring equipment for oil slick-related problems.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The UK has had no direct requests from the Gulf states for equipment of this type.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he is doing to establish the presence of dioxins in the Gulf; and whether the crude oil contains hydrogens.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* None directly, but the Meteorological Office research aircraft may be able to obtain relevant data on the composition of the plumes from the oil fires.

Blue Asbestos Dust

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the dangers posed to human health of blue asbestos dust particles distributed in smoke from the fire at the railway carriage storage yard in Leicester on 10 March.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* An extensive monitoring programme was initiated by Leicester city council soon after the onset of the fire at the railway storage yard. No asbestos fibres were detected in any of the samples taken. It was concluded therefore that the risk to the general public from this incident was very low. It is recognised, however, that such fires involving asbestos cause concern and therefore the Department has sponsored research on this subject for some years. Updated advice on asbestos in fires has just been published by the Department in the revised edition of "Asbestos Materials in Buildings", a free copy of which was sent to all local authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of the world conservation monitoring centre in Cambridge in relation to the Gulf.

Mr. Baldry: *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* As I indicated to the honourable Member on 15 March at column 1384 I pay tribute to the work of the world conservation monitoring centre in Cambridge, who have carried out regular assessments of the ecological resources of the Gulf states and how the oil slick and smoke plumes are likely to affect them.

Birds (The Gulf)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding has been given to the RSPCA team to train local volunteers in the cleaning of oiled birds in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs indicated in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on 15 February 1991 at column *609*, his Department provided the transport costs for the RSPCA team.

Care Home Trusts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken of the establishment of local authority care home trusts in the calculation of social services departments' standard spending assessments.

Mr. Key: The standard spending assessment (SSA) for social services for the elderly includes as an indicator the proportion of elderly people in each social services authority resident in an independent, registered home. An increase in this proportion reduces an authority's SSA. This is because residents of independent homes do not receive financial assistance from local authorities. Where a care home trust is established the number of residents will be included in the independent homes indicator.

Credit Approvals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his practice to issue supplementary credit approvals only to those local authorities which have received European regional development fund support.

Mr. Key: My Department issues supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) to local authorities for a variety of purposes. Authorities in receipt of European regional development fund support for projects falling within the other services block and the urban programme are eligible for SCAs associated with such projects. But SCAs are also available to all authorities undertaking certain types of project. For 1991-92, these include housing special programmes (such as estate action), urban initiatives and, within other services, a variety of initiatives concerned with waste disposal and environmental quality.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he took of the level of European regional development fund receipts when calculating the credit levels within the other services block for local authorities.

Mr. Key: The Government take anticipated European Community receipts into account at the national level when setting the level of public expenditure programmes, with the result that these programmes are higher than they would otherwise be.

The majority of capital resources on the other services block are distributed between individual local authorities in the form of block allocations on the basis of formulae recommended by the local authority associations. No explicit account is taken in this distribution of whether expenditure may be financed in part through grant from the European Community. However, in addition, the Government are distributing £25 million of credit approvals within the other services block in 1990-91 to authorities in receipt of European regional development fund grant on projects falling within this block. For 1991-92, it is planned to distribute £45 million for such projects.

Gipsies, Middlejoy

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about delays in announcing his decision about the proposed gipsy site at Middlejoy, Somerset; what are the reasons for those delays; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received representations from six persons or bodies including the hon. Member. He will issue the decision on this difficult and controversial case as soon as possible.

Royal Arsenal, Woolwich

Mr. John Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total value of work carried out for the Property Services Agency at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich by CITEC Electric Ltd.; and when the company will receive payment.

Mr. Yeo *[pursuant to the answer, 8 March 1991, Official Report, column 299]:* The total value of work carried out for the Property Services Agency at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich by CITEC Electric Ltd. is £20,029·29 inclusive of VAT, which has been paid to the company in full.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Expenditure

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what basis the Overseas Development Administration uses planned aid expenditure for 1990-91 rather than actual expenditure when calculating planned increases between the current financial year and future financial years.

Mrs. Chalker: As I explained to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley on 20 March at column *120*, figures for actual expenditure in 1990-91 will not be available until autumn 1991.

SCOTLAND

RENAVAL Programme

Dr Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) on 15 March, *Official Report*, column *713*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the programme of measures under the terms of the RENAVAL community programme which was submitted to the European Commission on 18 December 1990.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The programme is still the subject of discussion with the European Commission. I should be happy to send the hon. Member a copy of the programme when it has been approved.

Nuclear Energy Agreement

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he made of the likely impact on the Scottish electricity industry of being bound to the nuclear energy agreement for a period of 15 years.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The nuclear energy agreement is central to the privatisation of the two Scottish electricity companies, securing abundant supplies of baseload nuclear power at stable market-related prices for the next 15 years.

Private Electricity Generation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will seek to provide for private generators of electricity from renewable energy sources in Scotland that are unable to take advantage of the non-fossil fuel obligation which applies in England.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to do so.

Crime Prevention Week

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what financial and other resources are being given to local authorities in order to promote crime prevention initiatives for Crime Prevention Week;

(2) what financial and other resources are to be given to local voluntary groups for Crime Prevention Week; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what financial and other resources are to be given to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* local voluntary groups to build upon the work and activities of Crime Prevention Week.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The Crime Prevention Week is a Home Office initiative which does not extend to Scotland. Crime prevention publicity is undertaken in Scotland through the Secretary of State's crime prevention committee. The committee has recently developed a new national publicity campaign with a distinctly Scottish flavour. The first phase of the campaign, which ran for the whole of February, involved a new Scottish television commercial and extensive press advertising at national and local level to highlight the level of opportunistic crime and to promote the merits of domestic and vehicle security measures. Associated with the campaign is also a new Scottish version of the crime prevention handbook—"The Family Guide"—which is being widely distributed.

TRANSPORT

Wing Mirrors

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made on the effectiveness of the design of wing mirrors in the avoidance of accidents.

Mr. Chope: The Department has commissioned the Transport and Road Research Laboratory to investigate the effectiveness of wing mirrors as part of a wider research project.

M11 Link, Leyton

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many advance works have been undertaken, are being undertaken and are planned to be undertaken on property along, and adjacent to, the route of the Government's proposed M11 motorway link in Leyton.

Mr. Chope: In addition to those referred to in my answer on 16 November (Vol. 180, column 233), work is to start shortly on modifications to the London Underground structures, Gainsborough road bridge and Whipps Cross tunnel. Noise insulation has been carried out on residential properties close to the bridge and tunnel works, and further homes will be offered secondary double glazing prior to the start of the main works. The advance diversion of services is almost complete.

Internal work is being carried out in Leytonstone House hospital so that areas which will be adjacent to the road works can be vacated before construction begins on the A12 link road between M11 and Hackney Wick.

M3 Extension, Winchester

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will seek funding from the private sector, to be repaid from tolls, in order to meet the incremental cost of building a tunnel to accommodate the proposed extension to the M3 between Bar End and Hockley Cross roads at Winchester.

Mr. Chope: No. We have no intention of reopening the joint decision by the Secretaries of State on this much-needed scheme which followed 20 years of debate and four public inquiries.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision he makes in assessing grant levels to London Regional Transport of the cost of promoting private Bills.

Mr. Freeman: No separate provision is made for the cost of the promotion of private Bills when setting levels of grant for London Transport. These costs are included by London Transport in the total investment expenditure proposals which it puts forward in support of its requests for Government grant.

Holloway Road (Accident)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the accident, in which one person died, on the Holloway road in Islington on 8 March; and if he will make a statement on road safety on red routes.

Mr. Chope: The Metropolitan police are still investigating the circumstances of a fatal accident which occurred on a pedestrian crossing in Holloway road, south of Landseer road, in the afternoon of 8 March.

Road safety will be included in the monitoring exercise for the red route pilot scheme to be carried out during 1991.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Zeebrugge Ferry Disaster

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Attorney-General if he will seek a review of the judge's ruling in the case relating to the Zeebrugge ferry disaster; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: On 11 December 1990 I informed the legal representatives of all parties to the proceedings that I had decided, with the advice of leading counsel, that no point of law of general application arose warranting reference to the Court of Appeal under section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-British citizens of New Commonwealth origin, including British overseas citizens and British dependent territory citizens, are currently settled in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is available only on the number of citizens of New Commonwealth countries usually resident in Great Britain, excluding British overseas citizens and British dependent territories citizens. According to the labour force surveys there were about 540,000 such citizens in 1987-89, including students. Not all these persons will have settlement in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *142*, to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), if he will list those categories of foreign nationals from countries from where immigrant arrivals in the United Kingdom normally need a visa for entry who are exempt; and on how many occasions a waiver dispensation has been instituted since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Details of the visa exemption scheme and the 10 nationalities to which it applies are set out in the document referred to in the answer of 6 February. Visa regimes incorporating the scheme have been introduced on five occasions. There is in addition a long-standing transit without visa concession for airline passengers booked on an onward flight within 24 hours. The concession does not, however, apply to nationals of Sri Lanka and Iraq, or to nationals of Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Somalia if they seek to pass through immigration control.

London Fire Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has any proposals for the reinstatement of the pump appliance at Woodford fire station, temporarily withdrawn on 31 March 1979;

(2) if he will provide details of the current disposition of reserve fire appliances in the London Fire Brigade;

(3) if his Department envisages any reduction in the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority's budgets for the financial year 1992-93; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he has received any proposal from the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority for the reinstatement of a second operational fireboat in the London Fire Brigade.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is for the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, in the light of its statutory and fiscal responsibilities, to determine its budget for any financial year and the disposition of appliances and other resources consistent with the need to conform to the minimum nationally recommended standards of fire cover. It is not required to seek the Home Secretary's approval to reinstatement or increases in the number of appliances, reserves of which are currently understood to be 85 fire pumps (including 18 for training purposes) and 17 special appliances.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action has been taken by the LFCDA to implement recommendations Nos. 26, 30 and 109 of the Fennell inquiry report on the London Fire Brigade;

(2) what action has been taken by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority to implement a review of sub-ground radio communications in the London Fire Brigade in line with the recommendation of the Fennell report.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has updated its procedures and related training for handing over and assuming command during major incidents. A scheme to train operational personnel in fire prevention has been developed and is being implemented. The authority has also been working with London Underground Ltd. to improve sub-surface radio communications for firefighters. A programme of improvements includes the provision of a radio base station and associated work initially at 44 sub-surface railway stations and then to all others.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has any proposals to implement a trial of a warbling mobilising system at fire stations in the London Fire Brigade.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is understood that the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, following a trial, has decided to replace electro-mechanical bells at fire stations with a system which produces a similar sound electronically.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has any proposals to equip fire rescue unit appliances with geiger counters for use at incidents involving radiation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Each of the six rescue tenders in the London Fire Brigade is equipped with three survey meters and one contamination meter. All front-line appliances are equipped with one dosimeter per firefighter.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of fire stations in the London Fire Brigade, showing the establishment of *(a)* black and *(b)* female operational firefighters based at each fire station.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Information about ethnic minority and women operational firefighters in the London Fire Brigade is not collected in the form requested. The following information is contained in the brigade's establishment scheme in force on 1 January 1991, as notified to the Home Office by the chief fire officer:

London Fire Brigade: ethnic minority and women wholetime operational staff in post on 1 January 1991

	Number
Ethnic minorities	
(a) Afro-Caribbean	[1]144
(b) Asian (Indian sub-continent)	30
(c) Other	54
Women	[2]47

Notes:
[1] Includes 5 women.
[2] Includes 5 Afro-Caribbean.

Female Circumcision

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will establish a nationwide police squad to co-ordinate the prevention and suppression of female circumcision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so. The police will continue to make every effort to enforce the law against this practice.

Wakefield Prison

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making under the terms of his Department's authorised disputes procedures for his trans-Pennine area manager for prisons to meet representatives of the Prison Officers Association before 1 April to discuss staffing levels at Her Majesty's prison, Wakefield.

Mrs. Rumbold: A meeting under the national disputes procedure has been arranged for Tuesday 9 April. The Trans-Pennine area manager will attend this meeting along with national representatives of prison service management and the prison officers associations.

Stuart Bower

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when there will be a decision on the case of Stuart Bower, the former West Yorkshire police officer.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend hopes to reach a decision on the case shortly. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as a decision has been reached.

Devon (Petty Sessional Divisions)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his decision regarding mergers of petty sessional divisions in the county of Devon; and if he will treat this as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I hope to make an announcement very shortly.

HEALTH

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether national health service trusts will report directly to their regional health authority rather than his Department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health service trusts will be accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and Parliament via the national health service management executive. They will not report directly to their regional health authority.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will provide additional funding to Doncaster health authority to enable paediatric wards to be kept open.

Mr. Dorrell: Trent regional health authority is responsible for the allocation of funds to districts in its region. I understand that in 1991-92 Doncaster health authority will receive an initial cash allocation for its resident population which is 10·8 per cent. higher than it would have been in 1990-91 on a similar basis.

Bath Health Authority Houses

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether tenancy agreements have now been entered into by the residents of the Bath health authority houses which were the subject of legal action brought by C. and G. Homes Ltd.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that Bath district health authority hopes to complete the tenancy agreements in the week commencing 25 March 1991. There has been some delay because of the need to appoint signatories for several of the residents.

Disabled People

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Disabled Persons Act 1986 has been implemented with the exception of sections 1, 2 and 3 and sections 7, 8(2) and (3).

Sections 1 and 2 would provide for the setting up of a formal system of authorised representatives to be appointed either by the disabled person himself or, if he is unable to do so due to physical or mental incapacity, by the local authority. Section 3 would require local authorities to give a disabled person or his authorised representative the right to make representations about the need for services, to be given on request a statement of the assessed needs and services to be provided, and to make representations about any such statement.

Consultations with the local authority associations on what it would cost to implement these sections have been completed recently. The associations estimate these costs at about £28 million a year in England at November 1989 prices, including £18 million to establish and run a formal system of authorised representatives under all three sections.

The objectives of these sections are to give disabled people a greater say in decisions affecting their ability to live independent lives in the community. We fully endorse those objectives and have taken great care to see that they are fully reflected in the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the new arrangements for community care under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and associated policy guidance.

Under the provisions of the 1989 Children Act from 14 October 1991 disabled children will have the same protection which they enjoy currently only if they are taken into care. One of its key features is the emphasis on the need for parents, the child and others connected with the child to participate fully in decisions about service

provision in partnership with local authorities. The Act also provides for a representations procedure with an independent element to consider complaints and other representations from parents, the child and others connected with the child.

The new community care arrangements, which will be fully implemented by April 1993, have a wider scope than the Disabled Persons Act 1986 in that they cover all people affected by ageing or disability and give greater recognition to the needs of carers. They reflect and amplify sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons Act in a number of specific ways. From 1 April 1991 local authorities are required by directions under section 50 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act to have procedures for considering representations about needs and services. Anyone acting on behalf of a disabled person can make representations, including complaints, about needs and services, and local authorities are obliged to consider them.

When the community care arrangements are fully implemented, local authorities will need to have in place assessment arrangements covering all community care needs. For people with communication difficulties arising from sensory impairment, mental incapacity or other disabilities local authorities have been advised that they will need to take positive steps to ensure that they can participate fully in the assessment process and in the determination of service provision. Written statements of the results of assessments and any services to be provided will be supplied on request. These requirements have been set out by the Department in the document "Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond: Policy Guidance" (HMSO, 1990).

The Department is preparing good practice information and material designed to assist authorities to give effect to the community care policy guidance. This will include material on representation and advocacy including the development of local advocacy schemes. In addition, we are giving financial support to a number of voluntary organisations which assist disabled people to make representations about needs or services either through peer support or the provision of advocates or companions.

Disabled people within the meaning of the 1986 Act will retain their right under section 4 of that Act to an assessment of needs and a decision on services and where a need for services under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 has been established to have those services provided.

In the context of these substantial and wide-ranging provisions which provide protection for disabled people, to impose on local authorities the additional requirements of sections 1, 2 and 3 could carry the danger of diverting resources into complex administrative arrangements at the expense of services. We have therefore decided not to implement these sections, but we will review the situation again in the light of experience of the new arrangements.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of local authority care homes which currently fail to meet the requirements of the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Registered Homes Act does not apply to local authority residential care homes. Information about standards in local authority homes compared with those expected of registered homes is not collected by the Department. From April this year local authorities are required to have arms length inspection units charged with inspecting and reporting on both local authority and registrable independent residential care homes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the capital expenditure required by local authorities to bring their care homes up to the physical standards required by his Department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 24 January at column *294*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement on his policy towards care home trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Further guidance to local authorities planning to transfer their residential care homes to trusts or other agencies will be issued soon.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each local authority or health authority which has a policy of not sponsoring elderly persons resident in care or nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Returns submitted by local authorities to the Department indicate that all local authorities sponsor elderly people in independent sector residential care homes.

We are not aware of any health authority which has a policy of not sponsoring elderly persons resident in nursing homes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the average unit cost of bed spaces in *(a)* local authority residential homes, *(b)* private care homes, *(c)* private nursing homes and *(d)* voluntary homes for elderly persons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available. The gross cost per place filled (excluding capital charges) for local authorities' own residential care homes for elderly people is given in table F17 of "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services" publication. The latest available information is for 1988-89; a copy of which is in the Library.

King's College Hospital

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reasons have been given to him by King's college hospital for the late notification to his Department of the abortion of the King's college baby in September 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The legal responsibility for notifying a termination of pregnancy to the Chief Medical Officer lies with the doctor who performed the termination and not with the hospital. Several terminations were performed at King's college hospital during September 1989.

North Middlesex Hospital Trust

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names, addresses and qualifications of the directors of the North Middlesex hospital trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The names of the chairmen and non-executives of the North Middlesex National Health Service trust are available from the Library.

Non-executive directors are chosen for the personal contribution they can make to the effective management of the trust rather than for particular formal qualifications they hold. The chief executive is appointed by the chairman and non-executive directors. Other executive directors are appointed by the chairman, the non-executive directors and the chief executive and the appointments are thus a matter for the trust itself. The qualifications for executive directors are laid down in the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990 paragraph 4. (S.I. 1990, No. 2024).

Information about the chief executive and other executive directors can be obtained from the chairman.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the administrative costs of running the headquarters of each regional health authority in England including staffing and maintenance costs but excluding service delivery functions such as ambulance and blood transfusion services.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* Figures derived from the 1989-90 annual accounts of the regional and district health authorities in England are shown in the table. Regions are managed in an integrated way and it would be misleading to interpret regional health authority data in isolation from that for the districts they manage. The region totals provide a more valid picture.

With the variety of management and support functions provided by regional and district health authorities it is not practicable to exclude those costs at headquarters levels which are more directly concerned with the operational management of service delivery.

Expenditure by Regional and District Health Authorities 1989-90

Region	*Expenditure on headquarters administration*		*Region totals*	*Region total expenditure (current and capital)*	*Total regional expenditure on headquarters administration as a proportion of region total expenditure*
	Regional health authorities	*District health authorities*			
	£000 (cash)	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (cash)*	*per cent.*
Northern	7,475	30,429	37,904	930,953	4·07
Yorkshire	10,706	35,213	45,919	1,057,434	4·34
Trent	11,498	35,111	46,609	1,317,573	3·54
East Anglian	8,140	16,761	24,901	570,319	4·37
North West Thames	9,119	38,050	47,169	1,152,671	4·09
North East Thames	13,065	47,480	60,545	1,396,890	4·33
South East Thames	15,044	42,846	57,890	1,220,095	4·74
South West Thames	13,720	30,713	44,433	998,521	4·45
Wessex	6,244	26,586	32,830	824,042	3·98
Oxford	4,704	22,511	27,215	645,267	4·22
South Western	8,000	30,223	38,223	952,665	4·01
West Midlands	18,019	46,946	64,965	1,504,619	4·32
Mersey	6,044	25,640	31,684	751,098	4·22
North Western	12,356	41,094	53,450	1,253,376	4·26

Notes:

1. Expenditure on headquarters administration includes all current expenditure on the pay and pay related costs of staff of all disciplines (including general managers) employed at headquarters levels and their office costs and overheads. It excludes the cost of clerical and secretarial support staff employed in departments at hospital and local levels: such costs are regarded as operational.
2. The expenditure by each region will be influenced by a number of factors such as the size of the total budgets managed, the population served and the number of health authorities involved all of which differ between regions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gulf

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will request the United Nations Security Council to authorise an emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly under the provisions of United Nations resolution 377A(V) to deal with the diplomatic resolution of the Gulf war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is no need for an emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the Gulf crisis. Nor is there any basis under the United Nations Charter for General Assembly action. The Security Council has fully exercised its charter responsibility for international peace and security throughout the crisis, and remains actively seized of the matter.

Egypt

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to exchange civil prisoners with Egypt.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are negotiating a prison transfer agreement with Egypt that would enable prisoners to serve the remainder of their sentences in their home country.

The Egyptians are still considering the matter. We shall continue to press them for an agreement.

United Nations Association

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if her Majesty's Government will increase its grant to the United Kingdom United Nations Association.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: After careful consideration of all the applications for grants-in-aid, against the background of

available resources, a further sum of £24,000 was agreed for the UNA for the financial year 1991-92, subject to parliamentary approval. We have no plans to increase this.

Middle East Oil

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) of 13 November 1990, *Official Report*, columns *115-16*, if he will update the capacity figures for Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil refineries following the Gulf war.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The total refining capacities for Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil refineries, which I gave the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) in my answer of 13 November 1990 at col. *115*, remain unchanged following the Gulf war. We do not yet know, however, to what extent the operational capabilities of the refineries in Kuwait may have been damaged during hostilities.

Arms Control

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet non-governmental organisations on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I plan to host a meeting with non-governmental organisations on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues on 14 May.

Mrs. Maureen Paleschi

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communication Her Majesty's ambassador in Cairo has had recently with Mrs. Maureen Paleschi, currently in prison.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Consular officers from the embassy at Cairo visit Mrs. Paleschi regularly, most recently on 5 March 1991 when the consul found her well and in good spirits.

Middle East

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of the case for elections to determine the representatives of the Palestinians; and what estimate has been made of the effect of such elections on creating delay in the holding of an international conference on the middle east.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We support proposals for a dialogue between Israel and representative Palestinians. They could discuss among other things possible arrangements for elections in the occupied territories. This could be a useful step in preparing for an international conference which we think will be needed at the appropriate time.

Seal Culling

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Canadian Government expressing opposition to any increase in seal culling.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no plans to do so as we are not aware of any Canadian plans for seal culling outside accepted international conservation practices.

Iraq

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *716*, to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on contacts with opposition groups in Iraq, what information he has on opposition groups' proposals for the franchise as part of proposed democratic reforms.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iraqi opposition envisage free and fair multi-party elections under universal adult suffrage.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for giving practical assistance to the Kurdish population of Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are co-operating closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross in its admirable efforts to provide humanitarian assistance throughout Iraq, including in areas not controlled by Saddam Hussein's regime.

Soviet Union

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with Ministers and other high officials from the autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None, although we are keen to expand our links with all authorities in the Soviet Union where this would bring practical benefit.

Correspondence

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Office's East African Department will acknowledge or reply to letters sent on 4 December 1990, 10 December 1990, and 26 February 1991, by Messrs. Owston and Co. Solicitors, 44 Long street, Wigston, Leicestershire, in relation to the case of Mr. A. C. Patel of Westfield avenue, Wigston Fields, Leicestershire.

Mrs. Chalker: Messrs Owston & Co. were sent a reply to their letters on 20 March. The issues raised in the correspondence are not straightforward and involve consultation with a number of others both inside and outside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department maintains on the size of work forces of different employers, or of the largest work forces, in individual travel-to-work areas or constituencies.

Mr. Jackson: The information held by my Department reflects the PAYE arrangements of employers. Large employers provide separate returns on numbers of employees covered by each PAYE scheme. We have no means of aggregating returns in respect of different PAYE schemes for a particular employer.

The information is provided in confidence to the Department. Details of the largest work forces in a travel-to-work area or constituency would risk revealing the identity of individual employers and could not be released without their express permission.

Training

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether there are any age limits on entry into the employment training scheme; and whether he has any plans to introduce an age limit.

Mr. Jackson: People aged 18-59 inclusive are eligible to enter ET if they meet the qualifying conditions set out in the contract between the Secretary of State and training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training places funded or partly funded by his Department were available, and how many filled, in the parliamentary constituency of Tottenham in January 1989, January 1990 and January 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available for the parliamentary constituency of Tottenham.

Small Businesses

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to ensure that Government Departments pay small business suppliers promptly.

Mr. Howard: All Government Departments are committed to ensuring that the timing of payment is normally stipulated in all contracts. If, however, there is no contractual provision or other understanding or accepted practice governing the timing of payment, departments' practice is to pay within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand for payment, whichever is the later.

I also draw attention to the recent CBI/Cork Gully survey which found that national public sector bodies cause less significant problems than large private sector firms. Indeed, of those who deal with such bodies, a significant proportion of respondents said they cause no problem.

However, we are not complacent about this record. During the 1991-92 financial year major spending Departments will be monitoring their payment performance and will make an annual return to my Department. The results will be published.

Cobalt UK

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the proposed closure of Cobalt UK in Liverpool.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* My right hon. and learned Friend and I have received representations from the chief executive and from trainees with Cobalt (UK), Liverpool about this matter. The decision not to offer Cobalt (UK) an employment training contract in Liverpool for 1991-92 was reached locally by my Department's training, enterprise and education directorate's, Merseyside area office in full consultation with the chief executive of the Merseyside training and enterprise council which is scheduled to become operational from 24 June 1991.

Cobalt UK Ltd. has, however, been offered an extension to its current ET contract which was due to terminate on 31 March 1991 in order that the managing down of their provision in Liverpool can be handled sensitively and individual trainees' entitlements honoured with the minimum disruption to their training.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has made any estimate of the effect of the proposed closure of Cobalt UK on the unemployment situation in Liverpool.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The proposed closure of Cobalt UK should not have an adverse effect on the unemployment situation in Liverpool. Other training providers in the area, who have achieved a better ratio of trainees into jobs, are able to offer similar provision in locations presently covered by Cobalt UK.

TECs are required to use their best endeavours to secure alternative training places for trainees affected by possible closures.

Labour Statistics, Leicestershire

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the unemployment figure was in North-West Leicestershire *(a)* in June 1983 and *(b)* at the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* In February 1991 there were 2,024 unemployed claimants in the North-West Leicestershire parliamentary constituency. This compares with 3,410 in June 1983. Comparisons at the level of parliamentary constituencies are affected by the changes in the coverage of the count that have occurred over the period; this particular comparison is also affected by seasonal influences.

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs have been created in North-West Leicestershire since 1979.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* Estimates of changes in employment for parliamentary constituencies are available only from the censuses of employment. The latest available figures are for September 1987; the earliest are for September 1981. Between these two dates, the number of employees in employment in the North-West Leicestershire constituency increased by 600 or 1·8 per cent. The figures exclude the self-employed and members of Her Majesty's forces.

DEFENCE

"Options for Change"

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department will make a further statement on "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 19 March at column 149 to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran).

British Legion

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next meet representatives from the Royal British Legion to discuss the rehabilitation of injured service men.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have no plans at present to meet representatives from the Royal British Legion. However, Ministry of Defence officials are in regular contact with them about the rehabilitation and resettlement of injured service personnel.

HMS Challenger

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *70*, on what date in January he invited further bids for HMS Challenger; on what criteria he selected those to whom letters were sent inviting further bids; what were the terms of this renewed invitation to tender; what stage evaluation of the original bids has now reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend on 4 February at column *70*.

Airports (Armed Personnel)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if MOD personnel on duty at Heathrow airport have been involved in any incidents since their regular deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There were no incidents involving military personnel during their recent deployment at Heathrow airport.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what instructions are issued to military personnel regarding their authority in respect of civilians at Heathrow airport;

(2) if armed troops currently deployed in terminals at Heathrow airport have the power of arrest of civilians.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Army units deployed at Heathrow airport operate under the instructions of the Metropolitan police, and all military patrols are accompanied by at least one police officer. Service men involved have no legal powers beyond those of any other citizen.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list all British airports where armed military personnel have been on regular duty during 1991.

(2) who requested the presence of armed military personnel in the terminals at Heathrow airport and when; and how much longer they will remain on duty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Army units have been deployed in 1991 at Heathrow and Gatwick airports at the request of the Metropolitan and Sussex police forces respectively. The deployment at Heathrow airport, which began on 16 January 1991, was terminated on 10 March, and that at Gatwick on 20 January 1991, 48 hours after it commenced.

ASRAAM

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to prohibit the sale abroad of the advanced short-range air-to-air missile once it has been completed by the British missile production industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: Present Government policy will continue. Applications for the export of any defence equipment will be considered in the light of circumstances prevailing at the time.

The Gulf

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken by British forces and their coalition allies to recover destroyed Iraqi military equipment abandoned in Kuwait for *(a)* scrap metal recycling and *(b)* rebuilding for civilian uses; and if he has made an estimate of the monetary scrap value of all destroyed military equipment left over from the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are considering arrangements for the disposal of Iraqi equipment captured by British forces. These may include recovery for use as hard targets or display exhibits, and disposal for recycling. We have no information on the monetary scrap value of all destroyed military equipment resulting from the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British, United States and other coalition forces are in Iraq; and if he will make a statement on their withdrawal.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no British forces in Iraq. Coalition forces will withdraw from Iraq as soon as appropriate.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to recycling the materials of defunct and irreparably damaged vehicles and other British military equipment presently in Kuwait, southern Iraq or Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The small number of British vehicles which were seriously damaged during operations are being recovered to our logistic base in Saudi Arabia. Those that can be economically repaired will be returned to the United Kingdom or Germany. The remainder will be stripped of any useful items and arrangements will be made for the disposal of the residue, including recycling where appropriate.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service women are deployed in the Gulf; and how many were involved in combat.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* As at 28 February 1991 there were over 1,200 British service women deployed in the Gulf. No British service women were involved in combat.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Balance of Payments

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the non-oil balance of payments in each year since 1979 at 1990 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information from which the balance of trade in non-oil goods at 1990 prices may be derived can be found in table A7 of the Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics and its mid-year supplement, available in the Library of the House, or on the Central Statistical Office database which may also be accessed through the Library.

Civil Service (Pay Additions)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the cost to the Exchequer of special London pay points and of local pay additions in London, the south-east and south-west of England, for civil servants in each of the last five years; if he will break these costs down by Department; and if he will list the number of civil servants, by Department, who are in receipt of these additional payments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A breakdown of the information by Department could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. London spine points were first introduced in October 1988 for some groups of staff and by January 1990 had been extended to about 100,000 staff within the London weighting area—a radius of 18 miles from Charing Cross. The annual estimated cost is now £66 million. Local pay additions were first introduced in June 1988 and are now paid to about 63,000 staff with an annual estimated cost of £32·2 million, broken down as follows:

	£ million
London	21·3
Rest of the South East	8·9
South West	0·3
Rest of the United Kingdom	1·7
	32·2

Sports Ground Improvements

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the funding to be raised by the proposed new foundation for sport and arts he proposes to be spent on the ground improvements required as a result of the Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1987 and the Taylor report.

Mr. Mellor: It will be for the trustees, not for me, to propose in detail how funds are allocated once the foundation is established. However, I understand from the proposers that it is not the intention to make funds available to clubs in the Football or Scottish Football Leagues, or to any of our national football stadia. They already benefit from the arrangements announced in last year's Budget for spending on safety improvements to grounds.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the reasons for the revision downwards of his calculation of European regional development fund receipts for the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 between the 1989 autumn statement and the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Mellor: Figures for European regional development fund receipts are not published in the autumn statement. However the downward revision in the estimates published in the 1991 Government expenditure plans compared to those in the 1990 plans are attributable to a number of factors, including Departments' estimates of the timing of receipts from the Commission and of the expected level of allocations to the United Kingdom of structural funds under the various structural fund objectives and Community support frameworks.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council and the meeting of the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union.

Mr. Maude: The ECOFIN Council met in Brussels on 18 March. The intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union met later the same day. The Minister of State and I represented the United Kingdom at ECOFIN and I attended the IGC.

Progress was made towards a final agreement on special schemes for charging VAT in the country of destination on the following intra-EC transactions—private purchases of new vehicles; goods bought by mail order and other distance selling; and purchases by exempt or non taxable bodies.

The scope of reduced and zero VAT rates was also discussed. The Minister of State reiterated the importance for the United Kingdom of retaining our ability to continue to apply our present zero rates. The Council agreed to express a view on the approximation of VAT rates by 30 June.

Agreement was reached on an EC-wide increase in travellers' allowances for goods not subject to excise duty from 390 to 600 ecus (approximately £273 to £420) from 1 July 1991. Discussions continue on increases for excisable goods such as alcohol and tobacco.

It was agreed that the Commission's draft annual economic report was not out of date and that a revised version should be submitted to the Council for discussion and adoption in July.

The Council agreed in principle that a loan guaranteed by the Community budget could be offered to Bulgaria subject to certain conditions. The loan will be of an amount equal to the facilities offered by non-EC members of the G24 up to a maximum of $400 million dollars. The Commission was also invited to prepare a proposal for a similar facility for Romania.

The Council also adopted an opinion on the discharge of the 1989 EC budget following a presentation by the president of the European Court of Auditors. I stressed the importance of the court's work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Community's expenditure and drew attention to the United Kingdom's ideas for increasing financial management and accountability in the Community which we have put forward in the intergovernmental conference on political union.

The ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on EMU focused on monetary and institutional arrangements in any possible stage 3 of EMU, in particular the allocation of responsibility for external monetary policy and the organisational structure of any European system of central banks (ESCB). The United Kingdom, while taking an active part in these discussions,

maintains its general reserve on the subject of stage 3, and in particular on any move to a single currency and single monetary policy.

There was broad agreement that, if there were a single currency and monetary policy, ECOFIN should be responsible for determining the exchange rate system, and that the proposed ESCB should be responsible for day-to-day intervention. Differences persisted between member states in the exact delineation of responsibilities. On the organisational structure of the ESCB, I argued that national central banks should be given the greatest possible degree of autonomy.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the real £ sterling/Deutschmark exchange rate, in purchasing power parity terms, between *(a)* the beginning of March 1988 and entry into the ERM in October 1990 and *(b)* entry into the ERM and the present.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 19 March 1991]:* Following is the available information.

	Real Deutschmark/ sterling exchange rate
1990 1st quarter	2·70
1990 3rd quarter	2·96
1990 4th quarter	2·98

These figures are on a comparable basis to the historical series given in my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary's reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 22 October 1990 at columns 10-11.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing, for each year from 1979 to 1990 inclusive, *(a)* overseas investment in the United Kingdom, *(b)* overseas investment in the rest of the European Community taken together and *(c)* overseas investment in the United Kingdom as a percentage of overseas investment in the European Community as a whole, all figures to be based on OECD statistics, adjusted as necessary.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 19 March 1991]:* The following table sets out the latest readily available comprehensive figures published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on direct investment in, and transactions in the portfolio investment liabilities of, the countries of the European Community. There are differences in definition which mean that the figures must be used with caution. In particular, there is a global discrepancy in the reporting of overseas capital flows to the IMF which is currently under investigation. Inward investment includes total investment into each country, both from other EC countries and from outside the EC.

Inward direct and portfolio investment[1] in European Community (EC) countries

In billions of dollars

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
United Kingdom	7·6	1·5	11·0	17·0	35·1	36·3	49·2
All other EC countries[2]	26·9	27·0	36·4	30·4	36·4	71·8	128·4
United Kingdom as percentage of all EC countries[1]	22·0	5·1	23·3	35·8	49·1	33·6	27·2

Source: International Monetary Fund, Balance of Payments, Volume 41, Yearbook, Part 2, 1990, tables C.14 and C.15.

[1] Not included elsewhere in IMF returns (See page 5 of Source).

[2] Excluding Denmark.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 25 March 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

Iraqi Nationals

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have been made in regard to Her Majesty's Government's policy on applications by Iraqi nationals applying for *(a)* leave to remain in and *(b)* entry to the United Kingdom since 15 January.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 18 January my right hon. Friend introduced an immigration rules change (HC 160) under which applications for visas, leave to enter or extensions of stay by Iraqi nationals fall to be refused. These restrictions were introduced as an exceptional measure following the outbreak of hostilities in the Gulf. We are keeping them under review and will relax them as soon as my right hon. Friend is satisfied that it is safe and consistent with the national interest to do so. In the meantime, discretion to grant applications outside the rules is being exercised in compassionate circumstances where we are satisfied no threat to national security is involved.

National Security Detainees

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many national security detainees were released from *(a)* Her Majesty's prison Wormwood Scrubs, *(b)* Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton and *(c)* any other prison establishments on 8 March 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 8 March 1991 nine Immigration Act detainees, held pending deportation on grounds of national security, were released from Her Majesty's prison Wormwood Scrubs and 24 from Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton. No other prison service establishments were holding these detainees.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken following the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee in its fifth report of Session 1989-90 that applicants for naturalisation should be kept informed of the stage that their application has reached.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government undertook in their reply to the report (Cmnd 1368) to issue regularly bulletins on the progress of nationality work. The first such bulletin will issue shortly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued to immigration officers at ports of entry to the United Kingdom for the questioning of visitors from *(a)* Poland, *(b)* USSR, *(c)* India, *(d)* Chile, *(e)* Tanzania and *(f)* Taiwan.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Instructions are not issued on the basis of nationality.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* naturalisation and *(b)* registration applications awaiting decision were made (i) before 1 January 1988, (ii) before 1 January 1989 and (iii) before 1 January 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 20 March 1991 the number of outstanding applications by date of application was as follows:

Application date	*Naturalisation*	*Registration*
Before 1 January 1988	16,351	11,155
Between 1 January 1988 and 31 December 1988	12,912	1,915
Between 1 January 1989 and 31 December 1989	16,756	2,441

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to deal with applications for variation of licence to stay in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The estimated average length of time between the receipt of an application for variation of leave to remain in the United Kingdom and the decision, for cases decided in caseworking groups and in the public inquiry offices in the fourth quarter of 1990, was a little under two months.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to issue explanatory statements by the immigration and nationality department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Records are not kept of individual processing times for all explanatory statements but it is estimated that at present the average time taken to prepare and despatch an explanatory statement to the immigration appellate authorities is about six months.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the current and projected processing times for applications for *(a)* registration and *(b)* naturalisation;

(2) how long the immigration and nationality department takes to determine applications for naturalisation as at 1 March;

(3) if he has set targets for the time that his Department should take to deal with applications for naturalisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average time taken for certificates of registration issued in February 1991 was 24 months and for certificates of naturalisation 36 months. Our objective is to reduce both the level of outstanding cases and waiting time as quickly as possible. The level of arrears is reducing considerably, but I cannot predict when precise waiting times will be achieved.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications on behalf of over-age dependants who have established relationship by means of DNA tests have been *(a)* considered, *(b)* granted, *(c)* refused and *(d)* are pending under his discretionary policy.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 466 applications involving over-age reapplicants have been reviewed under the terms of the concession announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) on 14 June 1989 at

column *461*. A total of 108 of these applications have been granted and 358 refused. A total of 159 applications are currently awaiting review under the terms of the 1989 concession.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what changes have been made to the length of tiime for which an invitation/sponsorship form approval is valid; when the period of validity dates from; and whether there are variations, by country, in the length of time such approvals are valid;

(2) if he will list the countries from which visitors to the United Kingdom have to fill in an invitation/sponsorship form for approval before being allowed entry into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is open to an entry clearance officer to seek up-to-date confirmation from a United Kingdom sponsor if he wishes to satisfy himself that the immigration rules as to maintenance and accommodation will be met in respect of any national seeking entry to the United Kingdom.

Deportation

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals issued with notices of intention to deport on national security grounds *(a)* in November/December 1990 and *(b)* in January 1991, (i) left the United Kingdom voluntarily, (ii) were handed over to the Ministry of Defence as prisoners of war and (iii) appeared before the national security panel.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The answer is as follows:

(a) (i) three; (ii) none; and (iii) three.
(b) (i) 56; (ii) 35; and (iii) 48.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* other middle eastern countries have been issued with notices of intention to deport on national security grounds since November 1990; and how many in total were detained.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since November 1990, 144 Iraqis and 11 other nationals of middle eastern countries have been served with notices of intention to deport for reasons of national security, of whom 110 were detained.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals issued with notices of intention to deport on national security grounds *(a)* in November/December 1990 and *(b)* January 1991 and who appeared before the national security panel were, prior to 8 March 1991, (i) released with notices of intention to deport withdrawn, (ii) released on restrictions pending further investigation into the deportation decision, (iii) released pending the making of a deportation order, (iv) held in detention pending further investigation into the deportation decision and (v) held in detention pending the making of a deportation order.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The answer is as follows:

(a) (i) one; (ii) none; (iii) two; (iv) none; (v) none.
(b) (i) 14; (ii) seven; (iii) one; (iv) 25; (v) six.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will grant a visitor's permit to the spouse of a British citizen to enable that person to visit an hon. Member at his invitation, for discussions relating to the refusal of an entry certificate by an entry clearance officer in the Indian sub-continent so that that hon. Member, in whose constituency the spouse is resident, can determine how and whether to represent that person at an appeal against refusal of entry; and if he will confirm that, as the appellant will already have launched his appeal, the provisions of section 13(3) of the Immigration Act 1971 will not apply.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 14 March 1991 at column *656*. All visa nationals who wish to visit the United Kingdom, whatever the purpose of the journey, must apply for an entry clearance at a British diplomatic post overseas. The entry clearance officer would consider such an application under the relevant requirements of the immigration rules (paragraph 22 of HC 251).

By virtue of section 13(3) of the Immigration Act 1971, an applicant who holds a current entry clearance has a right of appeal in the United Kingdom against a decision to refuse him leave to enter the United Kingdom. However, a person has no right to enter or remain in the United Kingdom because there is an appeal outstanding against a previous refusal of an entry clearance.

Family Law

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each Government grant to organisations active in relation to family and divorce law and its operation in the past year.

Mr. John Patten: A list of all voluntary organisations funded by Government Departments was placed in the Library when details of grants made in 1988-89 were announced on 11 May last year at columns *254-55*. Similar details of grants made in 1989-90 are planned to be announced shortly in the same way.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average time between the lodging of an appeal and its determination by an immigration appeal tribunal.

The Attorney-General: It is estimated that in those cases where leave to appeal is granted the average time between the lodging of an appeal and its determination by the immigration appeal tribunal is four to six months, depending on the length of time it takes the parties to prepare for the hearing.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were pending hearing before the immigration appeal tribunals on *(a)* 1 March 1989, *(b)* 1 March 1990 and *(c)* 1 March 1991, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The information required is set out in the table:

Number of cases pending before the immigration appeal tribunal

	Number
(a) 1 March 1989	262
(b) 1 March 1990	177
(c) 1 March 1991	360

The immigration appeal tribunal received 35 per cent. more cases in 1990 than in 1989, which accounts for the rise in the number of cases pending as at 1 March 1991. Additional resources have been made available to the IAT to cope with the increased work load, and the Lord Chancellor's Department will keep the IAT's work load under close review to ensure that the number of outstanding cases is kept as low as possible.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Attorney-General how soon Ramesh Kumar's appeal against refusal of entry clearance to the United Kingdom on 22 January will be heard; and whether any regard will be taken of compassionate circumstances surrounding the case when the date for hearing is fixed.

The Attorney-General: Mr. Kumar's appeal papers were received at the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) in London on 13 March 1991. On 15 March 1991 the IAA despatched the case papers to Mr. Kumar in India requesting that he nominate a representative by 15 May 1991. Once Mr. Kumar nominates a representative in the United Kingdom, and the representative has prepared for the hearing, the IAA will aim to list the case within two to three months. The listing of immigration appeal hearings is a matter for the IAA which gives full consideration to all requests made to it from either party for the early hearing of an appeal.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Attorney-General whether, under the provisions of section 22 of the Immigration Act 1971, an appellant against the refusal of entry into the United Kingdom as the spouse of a British citizen, has the right to be represented at an adjudication or before a tribunal by an hon. Member.

The Attorney-General: The Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1984 (SI 1984/2041) made under section 22 of the Immigration Act 1971 state that in proceedings before the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) the appellant, with the leave of the IAA, may be represented by any person appearing to the IAA to be acting on the appellant's behalf.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General when his Department first became aware of the existence of documents relating to forensic tests carried out on 21 November 1974 on other ferry passengers besides the men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The Attorney-General: The DPP first became aware of such a document on or shortly after 8 October 1987 when he received a written statement by a scientist dated 5 October 1987.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General for what reason the statement taken by West Midlands police officers from the forensic scientist who conducted tests on passengers on the Liverpool to Belfast ferry was not made available to representatives of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings before their appeal in November 1987.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has asked for a report covering the handling of this statement. I will write to the hon. Member in the light of that report.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General for what reason the results of forensic tests carried out on passengers on the Liverpool to Belfast ferry on 21 November 1974 were not made available to the defence at the trial of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions was not aware at the time of the trial that such tests had been carried out.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General when the statement taken from the forensic scientist who tested the hands of passengers on the Liverpool to Belfast ferry, which has recently come to light, was taken by West Midlands police force officers; and what other statements were taken in 1987 by West Midlands police officers in relation to the Birmingham pub bombings case.

The Attorney-General: The first statement by the scientist was taken on 5 October 1987. A further statement was taken from him on 19 October 1987. As to other statements taken in 1987, I will write to the hon. Member giving him such particulars as I am able to provide having regard to the practice whereby the names of persons who have given written statements to the police in the course of their inquiries are held in confidence and are disclosed only to the parties to legal proceedings, unless the makers of the statements consent to wider disclosure.

Child Care Law

Mr. Forman: To ask the Attorney-General what further steps have been taken to name the judiciary who will deal with child care cases in the higher courts under the Children Act 1989.

The Attorney-General: The Children Act 1989 is due to be implemented on 14 October 1991. Central to the philosophy of the Act is the principle that children's cases in the higher courts should be heard by judiciary who, by reason of their experience and training, are specialists in family work.

Under the Courts and Legal Services Act the Lord Chancellor has the power to nominate such judiciary with the concurrence of the president of the family division. The nomination process will extend over a period of months and began on 22 November 1990 with the announcement of the names of 47 circuit judges who are to be known as "designated family judges". As a second step in the process the Lord Chancellor has today, with the approval of the right honourable Sir Stephen Brown, president of the family division, named two further groups of specialist judges.

The first group comprises 49 circuit judges who will be known as "nominated care judges" and the second group consists of 127 district judges who will be responsible for the allocation of care cases, in the higher courts. Both groups will sit at the network of county court "care centres", the locations of which were announced on 22 November 1990.

The "nominated care judges" will deal with substantive hearings and emergency protection orders arising in child care cases transferred up from the magistrates courts. They will also have jurisdiction in family proceedings.

As their title suggests, the district judges responsible for the allocation of care cases will deal primarily with the allocation and timetabling of child care cases transferred

from the magistrates courts. They will also be able to deal with emergency protection orders and interlocutory matters within transferred cases.

As announced on 4 May 1990, an extensive programme of judicial training is already under way. The nominated care judges and the district judges responsible for the allocation of care cases will receive training in the new procedures established by the Act. Special jurisdictional arrangements will operate in London where the district judges of the family division will have the same jurisdiction as the nominated care judges while also performing the role of district judges responsible for the allocation of care cases.

Lists showing the "care centre" locations together with the names of the nominated care judges and of the district judges responsible for the allocation of care cases have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Children Act Central Advisory Committee

Mr. Forman: To ask the Attorney-General who is to chair the Children Act central advisory committee announced by the Lord Chancellor on 9 July 1990.

The Attorney-General: Mrs. Justice Booth will chair this committee, now to be known as the Children Act advisory committee. The appointment will be for a two-year term.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nuclear Structure Facility

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils; and whether he discussed the funding of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of the ABRC on 15 January. At that meeting the board's advice on allocation of the science budget and other scientific matters were discussed. The future of the Science and Engineering Research Council's nuclear structure facility was not specifically mentioned.

Museums

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he has taken to assist museums to be able to respond to the demands to be made on them from classroom teachers who will be implementing the history national curriculum in terms of staff and other resources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Responsibility for funding staff at national museums rests with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts. Aside from independent museums, funding for local museums is in the main provided by local authorities. The Government will be providing some £170 million in specific grants in the 1991-92 financial year to help schools with the implementation of the national curriculum. It is up to each LEA to decide how to deploy the funds allocated to it, according to local needs and priorities.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has of the effect of his Department's circular regarding parents' financial support for school visits on the number of such visits to museums; and what action he plans to take.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has recently completed a review of the evidence of the effects of the charging provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 and circular 2/89 on school activities and concluded that the evidence does not point to a need to change the law. Evidence was received from a range of sources and included a survey of a sample of schools and all local education authorities commissioned from the National Foundation for Educational Research. The evidence suggests that there has not been a significant change in the number of visits to museums since 1988.

Teachers

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of teachers employed by each education authority.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested for January 1990 is contained in the DES statistical bulletin 5/91, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Non-teaching Staff

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of *(a)* non-teaching staff and *(b)* administrative staff employed centrally by each local education authority.

Mr. Fallon: Information on the number of full-time and part-time non-teaching staff employed by each local education authority has been placed in the Library. No information is available on the number of centrally employed administrative staff.

University Staff

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why he has decided to delay ratification of the agreement of committee A of the negotiating machinery for university academic and academic-related staff to increase London weighting with effect from 1 July 1990, through the committee B stage of the machinery.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No decision has been taken to delay: committee B is considering the proposal made to it by committee A on 13 February 1991 and will respond to it as soon as possible.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funding arrangements were agreed between his Department, the Universities Funding Council and the CVCP, prior to the offer made by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to the Association of University Teachers to increase the London allowance for university academic and academic-related staff, with effect from 1 July 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: None. Funding is a matter for the Universities Funding Council.

Administration

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the amount of money held for the administration element of central services for each local education authority.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to the replies of 21 February and 22 March to my hon Friend the Member for Harrow, West, (Mr. Hughes) at columns *235-38* and column *236*.

More detailed figures are set out in part 1 of the authorities' LMS budget statements for 1990-91, prepared and published under section 42 of the Education Reform Act, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Vacation Hardship Allowance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) in 1989-90 how much was paid out in vacation hardship allowance in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland;

(2) how many students received vacation hardship allowance in 1989-90 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave in respect of England and Wales to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 13 March 1991, at column *516*. Student support in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

National Curriculum

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish orders to introduce geography and history in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have published today documents setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for geography and history in the national curriculum and have laid orders which will bring these documents into effect from the beginning of the next school year for pupils starting key stages 1, 2 and 3 (those aged five, seven and 11 in September).

The publication of these curriculum documents will ensure that pupils follow sensible and comprehensive courses of study in history and geography. The introduction of national curriculum requirements for these subjects will lead to high academic standards and worthwhile levels of achievement by pupils.

The documents which I am publishing today do not include a reduced course in geography for pupils at key stage 4 who are not taking a course leading to GCSE. I intend to publish shortly for consultation a further draft order concerning the reduced course.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is making separate orders to introduce geography and history arrangements in Welsh schools.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pharmaceuticals

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has concluded his deliberations on the European Commission's proposed regulation on patent term restoration for pharmaceuticals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Government are still considering the Commission's proposal and intend to announce a position shortly.

Argentine Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if during his recent visit he discussed with the Argentine Government the Argentine Condor II ballistic missile project and the export controls required for such technology being developed by private industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* No.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Arms Spending

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to collate information on the percentage of gross domestic product spent on arms by countries which are recipients of aid from the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: As I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 13 March at column *517* we consider that there is room for improvement in such data, which are also included by the World bank in its "World Development Report" published annually. Such information is best collected on an international basis, and we are exploring how best this might be done.

Starvation

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the number of persons in the world who were starving, assessed on the basis of the OECD reports in 1961, 1971 and 1981.

Mrs. Chalker: According to the OECD no such assessments have been made. The most recent report available to us is the latest assessment by the World Food Programme that up to 29 million people may be at risk of starvation in 25 sub-Saharan African countries.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

7. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received concerning the impact of the transitional contract for supplies by British Coal to the electricity generators on the future of coal-fired power stations capacity in South Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Coal Industry Ownership

9. **Mr. Thorne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss future ownership of the industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of the British Coal Corporation regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Coal Imports

14. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the chairman of British Coal regarding the level of coal imports after 1 April 1993.

Mr. Wakeham: I have regular consultations with the chairman of British Coal on all aspects of the coal industry, including the remarkable efforts that the corporation has been making to improve its competitiveness and fight for a major share of the United Kingdom coal market over future years.

Offshore Oil Platforms

15. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the installation of emergency shut down valves on offshore oil platforms.

Mr. Moynihan: Of the 193 valves required to be fitted as a result of the Offshore Installations (Emergency Pipe-line Valve) Regulations 1989, 164 have now been fitted. In a further 13 cases, work is either in hand on the installation of the valves or the pipelines are shut down until the work can be performed. In 16 cases temporary exemptions have been granted until 31 March 1991 only, with stringent safety conditions attached, after which time these pipelines will also be shut down for the valves to be installed.

Privatisation

21. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of United Kingdom energy production was state owned *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* since the privatisation of National Power and PowerGen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: In 1979 about 45 per cent. of United Kingdom production of primary fuels was by nationalised industries. It is estimated that the proportion now is about 32 per cent.

In terms of the proportion of final energy consumption in the United Kingdom supplied by nationalised industries, this represents a change from 59 per cent. in 1979 to about 8 per cent. now.

Loft Insulation

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the Government's estimate of the percentage of Britain's housing that does not have loft insulation up to the standard of 1990 building regulations.

Mr Heathcoat-Amory: The higher requirements for the thermal insulation of the roofs of dwellings in England and Wales, introduced in the 1990 building regulations, can effectively be met by 6 in. of loft insulation. Information currently available on levels of loft insulation in existing homes does not enable identification of specific levels of insulation over 4 in. in homes in England and Wales.

Landfill Gas

23. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many landfill gas schemes are currently in operation.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is aware of 32 landfill gas schemes currently in operation.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to change the formula applied by OFFER for proposed price adjustments by the regional electricity companies to the domestic tariffs.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 22 February at columns *280-81*.

Oil Supplies

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the effect of the Gulf war on oil supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last year, and the cessation of its oil exports, other countries—mainly Saudia Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela—increased their production levels and made up the shortfall. Oil stocks have been at high levels throughout the period.

Offshore Supply Industry

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the share of the United Kingdom offshore supply industry in the world market for offshore work.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's best estimate is that the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry's share of the available market for offshore work was in excess of £6·5 billion in 1990 of which about a third—or approximately £2 billion—was exports.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the average annual level of expenditure on energy efficiency between 1974 and 1979, 1980 and 1984 and between 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Average annual expenditure by my Department on energy efficiency programmes in the five years ended 1984-85 was £9·9 million and in the five years ended 1989-90 was £19·8 million. This compares with expenditure in 1979-80 of £2·4 million; previous expenditure is not separately identifiable.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the steps currently being taken to strengthen the arms control regimes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are a number of arms control fora: further measures to supplement the conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE) treaty and the Vienna package of confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) are under consideration in NATO and among the participants in the Vienna negotiations.

Negotiations continue between the United States and the Soviet Union on a START agreement which we hope can be concluded later this year.

NATO is currently considering its approach to negotiations on short-range nuclear forces in Europe.

An early and successful conclusion is being pursued in the conference on disarmament in Geneva for a chemical weapons convention.

The third review conference of the 1972 bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons convention in September

will provide an opportunity to strengthen the convention by improving its confidence-building measures regime and reviewing the scope for verification.

Closer co-ordination is being sought in the Australia group on contacts on CW precursors and dual-use equipment.

Discussions continue in the United Nations, the co-ordinating committee for multilateral export control, the missile technology control regime and groups of nuclear suppliers on strengthening other arms control regimes.

Military Attaché, Baghdad

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what periods since 1979 the United Kingdom retained a military attaché at the British embassy in Baghdad.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom had a succession of defence attachés at the British embassy at Baghdad from 1979 until the last incumbent departed on 27 September 1990.

Nuclear and Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his oral answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, (Mr. Kaufman) *Official Report*, 13 March, column 929, he will set out the specific loopholes and weaknesses in the agreements and control regimes for nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to which he makes reference.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We work constantly to strengthen the control of all weapons of mass destruction through the co-ordinating committee for multilateral export controls, the missile technology control regime, groupings of nuclear suppliers and the Australia group. We are also working to achieve an effective global ban on chemical weapons through an international convention.

Iraq

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Ministers from his Department last visited Iraq, and what was the purpose and outcome of the visits.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office visited Iraq in February 1989 to discuss bilateral and commercial issues; to appeal for the release of Mr. Ian Richter; to encourage an early peace settlement with Iran; and to raise Iraq's use of chemical weapons and her human rights record. The policies of the Iraqi Government have prevented progress on any of these issues.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made by Her Majesty's Government since 1985 to other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in regard to their sales of military equipment and technology for Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our policy on sales of defence equipment to Iraq since 1984 was to refuse the sale of any equipment which would significantly enhance Iraq's ability to prolong or exacerbate its conflict with Iran. Since 1980 we had refused to allow the export of lethal equipment to either side. This policy was well known to the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Israel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed during his meeting with his Israeli counterpart in London on 5 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Discussions focused on regional security and the prospects for relaunching the Arab-Israel peace process following the ceasefire in the Gulf. There was also some discussion of bilateral issues.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to instruct the United Kingdom ambassador to the Board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency to seek to put on the agenda of the next IAEA governors' meeting the issues of *(a)* strengthening international nuclear safeguards and *(b)* the effects on the IAEA safeguards regime of the bombing of safeguarded nuclear facilities in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The director general of the IAEA raised a number of safeguards issues in his statement to the board of governors meeting in February.

The UK governor agreed that these were important matters to which the board would need to return at its next meeting.

Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the invitations his Department received to participate in or send an observer to conferences to be held in March.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Baltic States

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to his Soviet counterpart on the recommencement of the negotiations on self-determination for the Baltic states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the situation in the Baltic Republics with his Soviet counterpart, Mr Bessmertnykh and with President Gorbachev in Moscow on 21 March. In both meetings he stressed our belief that constructive negotiations between Moscow and the republican authorities should begin as soon as possible.

CFE Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the CFE treaty to date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The signatory states have taken certain steps (data exchange and corrections, notification of inspectors' names, active inspection quotas and other details required by the inspection protocol) under those provisions of the CFE treaty which were provisionally applied from the time of signature. Further steps in the implementation of the treaty (including the destruction/conversion of excess equipment and the establishment of the verification regime) will take place after the treaty has entered into force, which happens only afterall 22 signatories have deposited instruments of ratification. To date, no signatory has done so.

Legislative Competence

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to produce a guide to hon. Members on the areas of competence of EC legislation and the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The areas of Community competence are defined by the Community treaties, as interpreted by the ECJ. Through the European Communities Act 1972 and other legislation, Parliament has given the necessary effect to the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaties. In addition, scrutiny procedures enable Parliament to review thoroughly all proposals for Community legislation, and where appropriate to call for debates.

Missile Technology Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current information on the nations that are now members of missile technology control regime; and when they joined.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 1 February. Since then Austria has announced her adherence to the missile technology control regime.

Children

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to seek implementation of the articles of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child regarding children in conflict situations in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Iraq has not ratified or acceded to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and is not therefore bound by its provisions. We remain deeply concerned about the general human rights situation in Iraq.

Sharks

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Governments of the United States of America, Taiwan, Malaysia, China, Japan and Indonesia in respect of the slaughter of sharks for their fins; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We do not intend to do so.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *167*, what was the position of William Cowlins and Son with respect to the involvement of E. C. Harris in the proposed South Glamorgan TEC headquarters before 24 September 1990.

Mr. Jackson: I am not in a position to comment on any relationship that may have existed between William Cowlins and Son and E. C. Harris before 24 September 1990.

Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the reasons for the delay in updating the quarterly findings from the YT leavers survey; when he next plans to update the results of the survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Administrative systems used to collect information about YT leavers were changed last year. It has taken some time for the new systems to settle down. When I am satisfied that the YT follow-up system is producing good quality reliable data I will resume the release of results.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what effect the move to delivery of training provision through TECs has had on the collection, processing and presentation of data from both the ET and YT leavers survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: There has been no change to the system for collecting, processing and presenting ET follow-up information as a result of the move towards TEC delivery of programmes. The YT system has been changed to bring it into line with ET.

Training, Brixton

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library copies of the letters sent out in March 1991 by his training enterprise and education directorate inner London south area office to trainers in the Brixton area about funding levels for training in 1991-92; and if he will make it his policy to maintain current funding levels for training in the Brixton area.

Mr. Jackson: The letters sent to trainers in the Brixton area by the inner London south area office are confidential between the Department and the contractor and should not be publicised. It is not possible to give a guarantee that current funding levels in the Brixton area will be maintained.

Children's Rights

Miss Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the implementation of article 32 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and

Lancsdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd) on 21 March at columns *192-93*. Article 32 of the convention seeks to regulate hours and conditions of employment and, under the convention's definition of a child, would apply to young people aged 16 to 18. We believe that terms and conditions of employment of young people, as of other employees, are matters for negotiation between employers and employees or their representatives. We have therefore made it clear that when we ratify the convention we will enter a reservation on this article.

PRIME MINISTER

Kashmir

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will urge the United Nations to implement its resolutions that the people of Kashmir should be given the right of self-determination.

The Prime Minister: United Nations resolutions on Kashmir over 40 years ago were concerned with the accession to India or Pakistan of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Government consider that any proposal to resolve the continuing dispute over the status of Kashmir needs to take account of subsequent developments, and to be mutually agreed between the Governments of India and Pakistan.

President Gorbachev

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what matters were discussed at his meeting with President Gorbachev.

The Prime Minister: The main subjects we discussed were the middle east, arms control, the Baltic states, the progress of political and economic reform in the Soviet Union and bilateral relations.

Kuwait

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consult the United Kingdom Institute of Waste Management on the methods of reclamation of building rubble for the reconstruction of Kuwait.

The Prime Minister: The institute would be advised to register with the Department of Trade and Industry's Kuwait reconstruction database so that United Kingdom expertise in this field can be made available to the Kuwaiti authorities.

Nuclear and Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column 1094, to the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), if he will list in the *Official Report* those forums and institutions at which he intends to take up the matter of the export of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 6 March 1991.

Moscow

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister which organisations he met during his recent visit to Moscow.

The Prime Minister: During my visit to the Soviet Union I held meetings with President Gorbachev, Prime Minister Pavlov, Defence Minister Yazov and representatives of the armed forces, representatives of the Baltic states, and leading liberals.

Child benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister further to his oral answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column 456, if he will make a further statement on the uprating of child benefit.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the uprating of child benefit announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 19 March 1991.

Research and Development

Dr. Bray: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *472*, what is the estimate of total Government expenditure on research and development in enterprises with fewer than 200 employees; and what proportion of it is estimated to be for defence purposes.

The Prime Minister: The 1989 survey of expenditure and employment on research and development (R and D) in United Kingdom industry was largely restricted to enterprises with 200 or more employees.

A provisional estimate for civil and defence research and development expenditure in enterprises with fewer than 200 employees has been made of £255 million. Details are given in the notes of the Central Statistical Office's "Business Bulletin" issue 14/91, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The nearest grouping for which firm data, disaggregated into civil and defence R and D, exists is that with 200 to 499 employees for which the proportion of expenditure for defence purposes is 2·4 per cent.

President Bush

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the matters discussed during his meeting with President Bush in Bermuda on 16 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 21 March at column *193*.

Prime Minister, Tuvalu

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he met the Prime Minister of Tuvalu during his visit to London on 19 March.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what response he is making to the request for assistance in the establishment of a South Pacific disaster relief programme to respond to natural catastrophes, set out by the Prime Minister of Tuvalu.

The Prime Minister: This issue was not raised by the Prime Minister of Tuvalu when he saw the Minister for

Overseas Development on 18 March. However, we are always ready to respond to the need for disaster relief assistance whether in the Pacific or elsewhere.

Gulf War

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has concerning the extent of damage to sewerage systems, water purification plants, hospitals and medical centres in *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Kuwait arising from military action in the Gulf war; and what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to provide humanitarian aid to each country to alleviate hardship and disease caused by military action.

The Prime Minister: The United Nations Secretary-General reported to the Security Council on 21 March on Under Secretary-General Ahtisaari's findings following his mission to Iraq.

Ahtisaari reported that sewage systems, water purification plants, hospitals and medical centres are largely undamaged but are not functioning fully due to a lack of electricity and fuel. The United Nations sanctions committee is considering how to respond urgently.

Although Kuwait suffered widespread damage and sabotage to its infrastructure as a result of the Iraqi invasion and occupation, the Government of Kuwait have already started to organise repairs and have made arrangements to provide purified drinking water. Medical facilities were relatively undamaged and are continuing to operate.

The United Kingdom supports the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations relief agencies in Iraq and Kuwait. This year we have already given £2·5 million to the ICRC's Gulf appeal (the largest single cash donation) and US$1 million to the United Nations appeal co-ordinated by United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation. In addition, the EC Commission has given £8·75 million to support the relief activities in the Gulf region. The share of this attributable to the United Kingdom's aid budget is £1·75 million.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives have been taken by Her Majesty's Government's representatives to *(a)* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *(b)* the United Nations environment programme, *(c)* the International Atomic Energy Agency, *(d)* the International Energy Agency, *(e)* the World Health Organisation, *(f)* the International Labour Organisation, *(g)* the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, *(h)* the European Commission and *(i)* the United Nations, respectively, to alleviate hardship caused to civilians in Iraq and Kuwait caused by the Gulf war.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations relief agencies are the main international organisations providing assistance to civilians in Iraq and Kuwait. A multi-agency UN mission has just returned from Iraq where it has assessed the needs of the civilian population and will shortly be visiting Kuwait. Representatives of British non-governmental organisations, Oxfam and Save the Children Fund, just back from Baghdad, are also planning relief activities. UNEP is helping to tackle the effects of oil pollution in the Gulf. The EC Commission has given £8·75 million to support relief activities in the Gulf region. The share of this attributable to the United Kingdom's aid budget is £1·75 million.

We are not aware that the other organisations mentioned are currently providing assistance to civilians in Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what communications he has had with the director of the World Health Organisation concerning disease and epidemics in Iraqi cities arising from destruction of sewage and water purification plants, and electricity generating stations, by allied bombing in the Gulf war.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* We are in close touch with United Nations agencies including the World Health Organisation and the International Committee of the Red Cross about requirements for humanitarian assistance in Iraq.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *472*, he will make it his policy to make a one-off extra donation to the United Nations children's organisation, UNICEF, from the United Kingdom to help children in Iraq suffering as a result of the destruction of the economic infrastructure in Iraq from allied bombings.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* A multi-agency United Nations mission has recently been in Iraq to assess humanitarian needs. It will make recommendations to the Secretary-General on emergency actions the United Nations might take. In the light of the mission's report we will consider what response to make to any appeal for funding launched by the Secretary-General, including what would be the most appropriate channel.

Middle East

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the United States Government on the prospective role of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in a peace settlement in the middle east.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* We are in regular contact with the United States Administration on all aspects of the Arab/Israel dispute, including the position of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The PLO has done little to enhance its role in recent months.

Iraq

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister if he will obtain for 10 Downing street library a copy of the Simon Wiesenthal Foundation report on trade with Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* No.

Food Chain

Mr. Speller: To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish a single department of state to supervise matters relating to the food chain from farm to plate.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* No. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food already performs this function, sharing responsibility for food safety with the Department of Health.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the annual change in living standards since 1979 of *(a)* non-pensioner couples with children, *(b)* non-pensioner couples without children, *(c)* non-pensioner single people, *(d)* non-pensioner single people with children, *(e)* single pensioners and *(f)* pensioner couples up to the latest available date.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) on 26 July 1990 at columns *501-6*.

Disability

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the letter on severely disabled children the hon. Member for Birkenhead sent to him on 19 November 1990.

Mr. Scott: I apologise for the delay in replying but we will do so as soon as possible.

Social Fund Loans

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy towards allowing local offices to recycle social fund loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Loan recoveries are returned to the national budget and any recycling of the money is made centrally. This enables us to focus the additional funds on those offices whose budgets are under most pressure. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Local Offices

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are receiving income support in the areas covered by the Poplar, Stepney and Shoreditch Department of Social Security offices, respectively; and how many people in Tower Hamlets as a whole are receiving income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Information for the London borough of Tower Hamlets is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information in respect of the Department of Social Security local offices is as follows:

Total income support claimants

Department of Social Security office	*Number*
Poplar	13,829
Stepney	9,486
Shoreditch	10,025

Note:

Data derived from 28 February 1991 count of cases in action, which include a number of cases where payment has ceased but other action is continuing. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are receiving income support in the areas covered by the Poplar DSS office.

Miss Widdecombe: The total number of people receiving income support in the area covered by the Poplar DSS office is 13,829. Information in respect of areas within the local office boundary is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Note: Data derived from 28 February 1991 count of cases in action, which include a number of cases where payment has ceased but other action is continuing. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Over-60s Card

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in discussions on the European Community over-60s card.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom welcomes the proposal for an over-60s card and has responded positively to the idea. However, we, like other EC member states, are not yet in a position to reply finally to the Commission about implementation. Departmental officials are having further discussions with their European counterparts to seek to resolve various problems associated with the introduction of such a card.

I recently wrote to Members of the European Parliament about this matter and I will send the hon. Member a copy of the letter.

Attendance Allowance

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the study of the standards of examining medical practitioners for attendance allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We plan to publish the report in the summer.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring his Department has undertaken of the operation of guidelines for visiting doctors introduced last April to allow disabled children under two years of age to qualify for attendance allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Guidance was issued by the attendance allowance board to its delegated doctors on those factors which should be taken into account when deciding whether the medical conditions for an award are met in children with disabilities who are aged less than two years and for whom a claim has been made for attendance allowance. At the same time, the board also advised visiting doctors (examining medical practitioners) on the special needs of disabled infants which should be reflected in the reports of medical examinations. The examining doctors are routinely monitored by the Department's regional senior medical officers. We are not aware that any particular problems have emerged during the process of such monitoring following the extension of attendance allowance to children aged less than two years.

Lone Parents

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the research study on lone parents conducted for his Department by Professor Bradshaw and Dr. Millar, which is referred to in the White Paper, "Children Come First".

Mr. Jack: The Department has now received the final report of the research study. It is expected it will be published by HMSO by the summer.

Income Support

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was, on the same basis as the tax/benefit tables (i) the total income support of an employed married man with children aged four and six, in December 1990, whose income was *(a)* £70 per week, *(b)* £120 per week and *(c)* £140 per week, and (ii) the total income support of an employed married man with children aged three, eight and eleven, in December 1990, whose income was *(a)* £70 per week, *(b)* £120 per week and *(c)* £140 per week.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is contained in the tax/benefit model tables, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Low Wages

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families rely on means-tested benefits to top up low wages.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 March 1991]:* The table sets out the latest available information on the number of families in receipt of income-related benefits who were also in receipt of income from employment (either part time or full time). There is no agreed definition of what constitutes "low wages", and as indicated in the published DSS tax/benefit model tables, entitlement to income-related benefits can extend some considerable distance up the income scales depending on family circumstances and composition. The contribution made by income-related benefit to overall household income will similarly vary between families—clearly, some of the families listed will be entitled to larger amounts, whereas for others the benefit may form only a very small proportion of overall household income. Figures for income support and housing benefit are derived from the 1989 annual statistical inquiry and show the position at May 1989. The figure for family credit is an estimate of case load as at July 1990.

	Number
Income support	112,000
Housing benefit[1]	150,000
Family credit	325,820

[1] The total includes those in receipt of rent rebate, rent allowance and or rate rebate in England and Wales and recipients of rent rebate/allowance and community charge rebate in Scotland. This therefore excludes cases in Scotland who were in receipt of community charge rebate only.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Schoolchildren (Part-time Work)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated number of children of compulsory school age who work part-time; and if he will make a statement on the survey recently carried out by the North-Eastern education and library board on pupils working part-time.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available. It would be premature to comment on the survey undertaken by the North-Eastern education and library board until that board has completed its own consideration of the matter and submitted its views to the Department of Education.

Gas Pipelines

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek estimates for the provision of a gas pipeline from Morecambe bay or elsewhere to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The proposal being considered is for a pipeline between Scotland and Northern Ireland and estimates of the capital costs of the pipeline will form part of the economic assessment of the project.

Second-hand Cars

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many second-hand cars have been imported into Northern Ireland and how many exported in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and in each year how many came from and were sent to *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* the Irish Republic.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland holds statistical information on the total number of vehicles removed from the vehicle register as a result of having been permanently exported or scrapped but does not have separate figures on the number of exported vehicles. The information set out in the table relates to used vehicles registered for the first time in Northern Ireland having previously been used in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Origin	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Great Britain	9,255	11,077	16,675
Republic of Ireland	2,085	3,203	1,552
Total	11,340	14,280	18,227

Dumping

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to increase efforts to ensure *(a)* that the environment is protected from illegal dumping and *(b)* that existing sites where dumping has occurred are cleared.

Mr. Needham: In Northern Ireland district councils are responsible for controlling the disposal of waste, including illegal dumping and the clearance of sites. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is currently reviewing the problem of illegal dumping, in light of provisions introduced in the rest of the United Kingdom by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals, companies, or organisations have been prosecuted for unlawful dumping in each district council area, in each of the past seven years; and in how many cases prosecutions were successful.

Mr. Needham: In Northern Ireland, each district council is responsible for enforcing in its area the legislation on the disposal of waste. Records of prosecutions are not held centrally. However, the information which the hon. Gentleman requires will be sought from the various councils and I shall write to him as soon as possible.

Agriculture

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of workers engaged in agriculture in Northern Ireland in 1980, 1985 and 1990 *(a)* in total and *(b)* whole time.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	1980	1985	1990
Total agricultural labour force	63,500	60,600	58,400
Of whom whole time on farms	35,500	31,500	27,800

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many agricultural holdings there were in Northern Ireland in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	Agricultural holdings
1980	35,256
1985	32,426
1990	29,850

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time farmers there were in Northern Ireland in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	1980	1985	1990
Farmers:			
—whole time	27,600	25,300	22,700
—part time	10,900	10,700	11,900
—total	38,500	36,100	34,600

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of investment by the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland in *(a)* plant and machinery, *(b)* vehicles, *(c)* buildings and *(d)* works in 1979, 1980, 1985, and the latest year for which figures are available (i) in cash terms and (ii) at fixed prices.

Mr. Hanley: Investment by the agricultural industry in Northern Ireland in plant and machinery, vehicles and buildings and works in 1979, 1980, 1985, and 1990 is given in the table (i) in current prices and (ii) in constant (1985) prices. Separate figures for investment in buildings and works are not available.

	Current prices £ millions				Constant prices £ millions (1985 Base)			
	1979	1980	1985	1990	1979	1980	1985	1990
Plant and Machinery	40·94	27·59	45·22	43·46	56·24	34·19	45·22	33·69
Vehicles	8·68	5·39	9·38	15·50	13·56	7·41	9·38	10·64
Buildings and Works	50·93	76·92	110·40	82·38	72·45	83·34	110·40	58·43

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* ewes and shearlings, *(b)* dairy cows and *(c)* breeding sows and gilts there were in Northern Ireland (i) in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and (ii) on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	Ewes ('000)	Dairy cows ('000)	Sows and gilts ('000)
1979-81[1]	542	268	71
1986	819	292	62
1987	886	289	60
1988	980	279	62
1989	1,085	277	58
1990	1,168	278	59

[1]Average.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tractors were acquired by the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland *(a)* in total and *(b)* of 40 kW and over, in 1979, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hanley: The numbers of agricultural tractors first registered in Northern Ireland in 1979, 1985 and 1990 were as follows:

	Number
1979	1,882
1985	2,257
1990	1,312

The information is not available by the tractor's kilowatt power rating.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hectares of *(a)* cereals and *(b)* potatoes were grown in Northern Ireland *(a)* in each of the five years for 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	Cereals ('000 ha)	Potatoes ('000 ha)
1979-81[1]	57·3	14·0
1986	53·9	11·8
1987	52·3	12·4
1988	50·1	12·0
1989	47·9	10·3
1990	45·3	10·8

[1]Average.

WALES

Children Act

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what element was included in his revenue support grant to cover statutory provisions relating to the Children Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: Revenue support grant is paid in support of expenditure on services generally and is not earmarked for particular services. In setting the level of

total standard spending for Wales for 1991-92 account was taken of the local authority associations' view that the introduction of measures under the Children Act 1989 would cost £1·5 million in that financial year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the standard spending assessment for *(a)* education and *(b)* social services, for each local authority in Wales in 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh revenue support grant formulae do not form a basis for calculating standard spending assessments for individual services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the relative rates of increase in Wales of *(a)* council spending, *(b)* inflation and *(c)* the uniform business rate and locally determined rate poundage, over the preceding 10 years.

Mr. David Hunt: Information available is shown in the following table:

Percentage change on year earlier

	Revenue spending[1]	*Retail prices index*[2]	*Average general rate poundage*
1981-82	N/A	11·4	14·2
1982-83	5·8	7·3	3·1
1983-84	5·0	5·1	0·7
1984-85	2·9	4·7	8·1
1985-86	3·7	5·9	7·8
1986-87	8·2	3·0	12·5
1987-88	7·1	4·2	7·2
1988-89	9·2	5·9	8·8
1989-90	[3]8·1	7·6	10·1
1990-91	[3]11·7	10·9	[4]N/A

[1] Revenue expenditure net of specific Government grants, sales, fees and charges. Because definitional changes in 1990-91, the percentage change shown for that year is on a slightly different basis to those shown for the earlier years.

[2] Using September of each year as the reference point.

[3] Provisional.

[4] Due to the change to the uniform business rate in 1990-91, no comparison with the preceding year is available.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether specific grants were ring-fenced for social service expenditure in the settlement for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: The following specific grants in respect of the Government's social services training support programme for local authority social services staff in Wales were included in the Welsh revenue support grant settlement for 1991-92:

	£ (000s)
Child care	453
Children Act 1989	240
Community care	465
Post qualifying level training for staff in management and training posts	300
	1,458

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the basis per adult for redistribution of the uniform business rate to local councils in Wales for *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Non-domestic rates income is distributed to local authorities in accordance with the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales and paragraphs 12 and 13 of schedule 8 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The figures per head of relevant population are as follows:

	Districts £	*Counties* £
1990-91	32	171
1991-92	40	200

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what share of the total uniform business rate is being paid by *(a)* factories and *(b)* warehouses in Wales; and what were their relevant shares before the introduction of the uniform business rate.

Mr. David Hunt: The relevant shares of the total uniform business rate being paid by *(a)* factories and *(b)* warehouses in Wales and their relevant shares before the introduction of the uniform business rate are shown in the following table:

	Percentage share of total non-domestic rates		
	1989-90	*1990-91 before transition*	*1990-91 after transition*
(a) Factories	26	19	26
(b) Warehouses	6	5	6

Community Charge

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that employees who are required, for short periods of the year, to live in at their place of work are not required to pay community charge in respect of both their permanent abode and their temporary residence at their place of work.

Mr. David Hunt: Following our initial review of the community charge last year and associated consultation on the document entitled "The Standard Community Charge and Other Matters", a number of changes to the structure of the standard charge were brought into force by means of the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1990 (S.I. 1990/2475). Among the new prescribed classes that will apply from 1 April 1991 is a class of unoccupied property (class M), with a maximum standard charge multiplier of 0·5 where the person subject to the standard community charge occupies another property which is job-related. In addition, local authorities already possess considerable discretion to specify their own standard community charge classes, and they may do so by reference to a number of factors, including the circumstances—other than financial circumstances—of persons subject to a standard charge.

Damage to Highways

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he is now giving to local highway authorities in Wales with regard to the payment for damage done to highways in Wales by the fracturing of water mains and the consequential costs of repairs.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950 contains provisions on the liability of water authorities and other undertakers to highway authorities for damage caused to the property of the highway authority. However, the current provisions have led to a number of disputes over the apportionment of costs of repairing roads following the fracturing of water mains. The New Roads and Street Works Bill now before Parliament would replace the 1950 Act provisions with a straightforward duty on undertakers to compensate the highway authority in respect of any damage or loss suffered by the authority as a result of the execution of street works or an event such as burst main.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to sell off investments currently held by the Welsh Development Agency in Welsh companies.

Mr. David Hunt: Under guidelines issued by my Department, the Welsh Development Agency seeks to dispose of shares at the earliest practicable time consistent with its statutory purposes.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total estimated value of investments currently held by the Welsh Development Agency in Welsh companies.

Mr. David Hunt: Latest available estimate of the gross value of the Welsh Development Agency's equity investment portfolio is £8 million.

Development Assistance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has taken steps with the European Commission to press for an extension to the programme timetable for the Dyfed-Gwynedd-Powys national programme of Community interest for a further two years; and if he will make a statement on the expenditure pattern of the programme to date.

Mr. David Hunt: The European Commission has already agreed funds to enable the Dyfed Gwynedd Powys programme to continue until the end of 1993. Out of a total ERDF commitment of £79·4 million for 1987 to 1991, £51·2 million has already been committed and I anticipate that the remaining funds available for allocation in 1991 will be taken up.

Salmon and Sea Trout

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the most up-to-date estimate of the number of *(a)* salmon and *(b)* sea trout making spawning runs in the waters and Rivers (i) Taff and (ii) Ely or their estuarial waters for each year since 1987.

Mr. David Hunt: There are no means of recording the number of salmon and sea trout entering to spawn on the rivers Taff and Ely or their esturial waters. However, records are kept by the Welsh region of the National Rivers Authority of the number of these fish reported by anglers, captured by the NRA, or found dead. These records provide minimum estimates of the runs of salmon and sea trout into the two rivers, and are as follows:

	Salmon	*Sea Trout*
River Taff		
1987	58	409
1988	124	322
1989	37	101
[1]1990	163	141
River Ely		
No salmon or sea trout recorded prior to 1989		
1989	13	23
1990	51	73

[1] Incomplete.

M4

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the dates on which the two motorway signs on the westbound carriageway of the M4 motorway at junction 48 were damaged; and by when he proposes to have them repaired.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Superficial damage occurred during the storms of Janaury 1990, but the more substantial damage occurred in February 1991. Both signs will be repaired by mid-April.

Elderly People

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the Government's current policy towards the elderly in Wales; if he will comment on funding arrangements of organisations connected with the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Our aim is to ensure that, wherever possible, elderly people are able to live with comfort and dignity in their own homes and communities. To secure this we have a wide range of co-ordinated policies and initiatives covering personal social services, health, housing and other matters. Organisations connected with the elderly benefit from a wide range of funds made available by the Department for a number of purposes. In addition to the general financial support provided to statutory authorities, we have just announced, for instance, special grants in 1991-92 totalling more than £750,000 to promote more flexible forms of community care for elderly people provided by a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies. We shall also continue to contribute to the funding of 56 projects that are under-way throughout Wales under the Elderly Initiative at a planned cost of £2·3 million in 1991-92. We expect shortly to announce the allocation of resources in 1991-92 to voluntary bodies in this field operating at the all-Wales level.

Agriculture

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* ewes and shearlings, *(b)* breeding sows and gilts and *(c)* dairy cows there were in Wales (i) in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and (ii) on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is shown in the following table:

At June	Ewes and shearlings	Breeding sows and gilts	Dairy cows
1990	5,234,964	12,036	327,009
1989	5,111,490	12,680	329,890
1988	4,893,276	14,551	336,798
1987	4,700,960	15,530	352,820
1986	4,566,884	16,153	364,942
Average 1979-81 inclusive	3,903,031	16,548	355,641

Figures include estimates for minor holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many agricultural holdings there were in Wales in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: There were 37,098 in 1980, 36,137 in 1985 and 36,487 in 1990. These totals include minor holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time farmers there were in Wales in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested in respect of farmers, partners and directors working on agricultural holdings is shown in the following table:

At June	Whole-time	Part-time
1980	24,872	9,388
1985	24,461	11,852
1990	23,404	11,642

Figures include estimates for minor holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of workers engaged in agriculture in Wales in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively, *(a)* in total and *(b)* whole time.

Mr. David Hunt: The information on the number of workers on agricultural holdings is shown in the following table:

At June	Total	Whole-time
1980	21,513	8,779
1985	20,672	7,640
1990	18,343	6,164

Included as workers are family workers, other than spouses, hired, seasonal and casual workers, and salaried managers. Figures include estimates for minor holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of *(a)* cereals and *(b)* potatoes were grown in Wales (i) in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and (ii) on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is shown in the following table:

	Hectares under	
At June	Cereals	Potatoes
1990	56,016	4,329
1989	61,621	4,241
1988	66,700	4,759
1987	67,367	5,109
1986	66,497	5,424

The average area under cereals and potatoes in 1979-81, inclusive, was 73,718 and 6,172 hectares respectively.

The figures include estimates for minor holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tractors were acquired by the agriculture industry *(a)* in total and *(b)* of 40 kW and over, in Wales in 1979, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on acquisitions of tractors is not collected.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of investment by the agricultural industry in *(a)* plant and machinery, *(b)* vehicles, *(c)* buildings and *(d)* works in Wales, in 1979, 1980, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available (i) in cash terms (ii) at fixed prices.

Mr. David Hunt: Gross fixed capital formation in the Welsh agricultural industry as follows:

	Current prices	Constant 1985 prices
Plant and machinery		
1979	29·0	39·8
1980	23·0	28·5
1985	30·0	30·0
[2]1989	25·8	20·9
Buildings and works[1]		
1979	29·0	41·3
1980	44·0	47·7
1985	69·0	69·0
[2]1989	50·6	39·3
Vehicles		
1979	7·7	12·0
1980	9·1	12·5
1985	15·4	15·4
[2]1989	12·8	9·5

[1] Figures are not available separately for works.
[2] (provisional)

Note
Constant prices have been calculated from implicit price indices for agricultural investment (1985 = 100)

History and Geography

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to lay before the House the statutory orders in relation to history and geography in the national curriculum.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today laid before the House the statutory orders with associated documents setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for history and geography in the national curriculum for pupils from age five to 16 in schools in Wales. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions took place between his Department and the United States Department of Defense concening the decision to attack the withdrawing Iraqi forces at the Al-Muttla gap;

(2) what opportunities to surrender were offered to the withdrawing Iraqi forces on the road to Basra while they were in transit;

(3) what discussions took place between the Allied military commanders in the Gulf and the Kuwaiti Government in exile concerning the decision to bomb the withdrawing Iraqi forces at the Al-Muttla gap;

(4) whether he has any information as to whether there were any Kuwaiti captives travelling down the Basra road in the columns of withdrawing Iraqi forces that were subject to Allied air attack in the final days of the Gulf conflict; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what were the nationalities of the Allied aircraft involved in the bombing of withdrawing Iraqi forces at the Al-Muttla gap; and what role RAF planes played in this;

(6) what is his Department's assessment of the number of Iraqi vehicles destroyed at the Al-Muttla gap; and how many of these were specifically military vehicles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Allied attacks during the night of 26-27 February on Iraqi units moving north with their equipment ahead of the allied advance on Kuwait city were part of the military operation to liberate Kuwait and to restore the legitimate Government, and were directed by coalition commanders in the same way as other military actions during the campaign. Fighting was in progress throughout the theatre and it was allied policy to attack Iraqi units which could continue to pose a threat. RAF aircraft were not involved in the attacks between Kuwait city and the Matla ridge as this was outside the area of operations of British forces, and I am therefore not able to comment in detail on the attacks. We have no precise information on the number of vehicles destroyed, although many were military, including a large number of tanks. Civilian vehicles were also being used by the Iraqi military. We have no information on whether any Kuwaiti detainees were in the vehicles. Any civilian casualties are greatly regretted but responsibility for the deaths of any Kuwaitis being taken to Iraq against their will lies with Saddam Hussein.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment as to the means by which Kuwaiti captives were returned to Iraq during the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not know how and when Kuwaiti detainees were moved to Iraq.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department was aware of the locations of Kuwaiti captives held in Iraq between 2 August 1990 and the cessation of hostilities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review his Department has made of the safety of the existing designs and designs currently under development of nuclear warheads; what application of three-dimensional modelling has been used; and what reconsideration has resulted of the safety case for an actual nuclear explosion which might be accidentally or unintentionally initiated leading to the dispersal of radioactivity and/or a nuclear yield.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All of the United Kingdom's nuclear warheads are designed to meet stringent safety requirements. Before entering operational service, the designs are subject to a comprehensive series of trials and assessments, encompassing normal and credible abnormal environments of in-service life, and to formal safety approvals procedures, which are assessed independently. In addition, the United Kingdom conducts a continuous safety review of all operationally deployed designs by way of routine examination and sophisticated modelling.

Radiofrequency Radiation Weapons

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the British Army has any radiofrequency radiation weapon capability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The British Army keeps abreast of developments in the military use of the electro-magnetic spectrum.

Housing

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many properties, owned and administered by his Department, have stood vacant *(a)* for over six months or *(b)* for over one year; and what is the regional distribution of these properties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not maintained in the precise form requested. As at 31 December 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, 8,227 service married quarters in the United Kingdom had been vacant for under one year and 2,365 for one year and over. In addition, 75 Ministry of Defence civilian houses and flats in the United Kingdom had been vacant for under six months and 93 for six months and over. The regional breakdown is as follows:

Region	*Married quarters vacant*		*MOD civilian houses vacant*	
	Under one year	*Over one year*	*Under six months*	*Over six months*
Northern	67	12	1	2
Yorkshire	573	177	—	—
East Midlands	390	430	—	—
East Anglia	488	132	—	—
South East	3,121	795	29	17
South West	1,409	154	12	23
West Midlands	278	63	—	—
North West	134	—	—	—
Wales	347	71	2	5
Scotland	910	423	31	46
Northern Ireland	510	108	—	—
TOTAL	8,227	2,365	75	93

Many of these properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly and others were being considered for disposal. A total of 1,701 of the dwellings were already in the process of being sold.

Research and Development

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department obliges defence contractors to declare to him the nature and value of any sub-contracts for research and development that they place with other companies.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On major contracts the Ministry of Defence requires the presentation of "make or buy" plans detailing each work package valued at £50,000 or more. These indicate whether work is intended to be carried out in-house or to be sub-contracted. In addition, contractors are required to notify the Ministry in advance of any sub-contract which they intend to place which includes design or development work. In appropriate cases the Ministry will then enter into a design rights agreement direct with the sub-contractor concerned.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department is making in its work with the Central Statistical Office in relation to the interpretation of Frascati definitions as they apply to defence research and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Statisticians in MOD and CSO have had a number of preliminary discussions about the interpretation of Frascati definitions as they apply to defence R and D and will shortly be commencing consultation with representatives of industry.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average percentage profit element included in research and development contracts placed by his Department in private industry.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In the case of a contract awarded by competition the element included in the price in respect of profit is a mater for the commercial judgment of the tenderer.

In respect of non-competitive contracts the Government profit formula does not draw any distinction between research and development contracts and other types of contract. For the average contractor the target rates of return on cost, on the basis of historic cost accounting, are:

	Per cent.
Risk contracts (for example, those priced on the basis of forward estimates of cost)	11·08
Non-risk contracts (for example, cost plus percentage fee)	8·52

In the case of risk contracts the profit which the contractor actually earns will depend on the efficiency with which he performs the contract.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the amount of his Department's research and development expenditure in private industry which is further sub-contracted to other companies.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There is no departmental requirement to hold such information and disproportionate cost would be incurred in seeking to prepare an estimate.

HMS Endurance

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Endurance was built; what is her expected future life in service; and what steps are being taken to design a replacement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Endurance was completed as the MV Anita Dan in 1956. She was subsequently purchased by the Ministry of Defence and converted to an ice patrol ship in 1967-68. HMS Endurance is capable of operating until the mid-1990s. The requirement for a replacement is being studied.

Medication

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will examine the contracts of service men and women in respect of the provision of non-prescribed medication;

(2) if he will consider changing the system whereby service men and women are expected to pay for non-prescribed medication.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The conditions of service for the armed forces allow non-prescribed medication issued to service personnel through military facilities to be provided free of charge. There are no plans to change this system.

Army Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what countries were represented at the 1990 British Army equipment exhibition and at the previous exhibition.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 28 March 1990 at column *237*.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nationals held as prisoners of war were *(a)* released following hearings before an Army board of inquiry and *(b)* released on 6 March 1991 following the cessation of hostilities in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Three Iraqi nationals held as prisoners of war were released from Rollestone camp following hearings before Army boards of inquiry; the remaining 32 were released on 6 March.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dairy Cows

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dairy cows there were in England and the European Community, respectively *(a)* in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is in the table:

Dairy cow numbers in European Community and England at December each year

Source: Eurostat *('000 head)*

	1979-81	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
England	2,380	2,292	2,150	2,098	2,072	2,043
European Community	[2]24,947	25,719	[2]24,680	24,166	23,780	[1]23,209

[1] Provisional as at 1 March 1991.
[2] Excluding, Portugal, Spain and Greece.

Note: These figures are not directly compatible with those published in table 5.17 of Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1990 which refers to populations in June, because for European Community purposes populations are normally measured at December of each year.

Sharks

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what shark products have been imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last three years.

Mr. Curry: The volumes and values of imports of products of dogfish and other sharks are given in the table. Information on fresh fillets, minced fish, livers and roes and other products are not readily available.

Imports of shark products to United Kingdom

	1988		1989		1990	
	Volume (tonnes)	Value (£000)	Volume (tonnes)	Value (£000)	Volume (tonnes)	Value (£000)
Fresh or chilled:						
Dogfish[1]	3,377	1,367	1,085	615	236	193
Other sharks	109	67	34	30	923	553
Frozen:						
Dogfish[1]	917	908	1,284	1,471	1,549	1,874
Other sharks	124	160	184	191	335	366
Frozen fillets						
Dogfish[1]	1	1	31	12	30	29
Other sharks	14	24	6	21	7	11

[1] Comprising the species squalus acathias and scyliorhinus spp.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

EC Surplus Food

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when decisions will be made on the designation of applicant organisations under the EC surplus food scheme; and whether groups of parish councils will be eligible for appointment.

Mr. Curry: The closing date for applications under the EC surplus food scheme was 22 March. All applications received by then are currently being considered and an announcement will be made as soon as possible. Applicant parish councils meeting the requirements of the scheme will be designated.

Cereals

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares of cereals are grown in England and the European Community, respectively *(a)* in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Curry: The information requested by the hon. Member is set out in the table. The figures for the European Community are all for the Community as at present constituted minus the former German Democratic Republic, which joined after the 1990 cereals harvest.

'000 hectares

	England[1]	European Community[2]
1979-81 average	3,296	36,652
1986	3,368	35,560
1987	3,296	35,053
1988	3,256	34,956
1989	3,257	35,178
1990	3,076	33,405

[1] Source: MAFF
[2] Source: 1979 to 1989, Eurostat. 1990, European Commission.

Agricultural Holdings

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many agricultural holdings there were in England and the European Community, respectively, in 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Curry: The available information is as follows:

	1980	1985	[1]1990
England[2]	155,688	153,766	150,652
EC[3]	6,820,287	6,359,133	—

[1] EC figure for 1990 not yet available.
[2] For comparability, the figures for England exclude minor holdings.
[3] EC10

Farmers

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time farmers there were in England and the European Community, respectively, in 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Curry: The information requested for England is provided in the table. Information on the numbers of farmers in the European Community in 1980, 1985 and

1987 is set out on pages T/102 and T/103 of the Commission's publication, "The Agricultural Situation in the Community, 1980 Report", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Farmers, partners and directors in England

as at June	*Whole time* '000	*Part time* '000
1980	136·6	59·8
1985	129·8	58·0
1990	119·0	63·0

Source: June Agricultural Census.

Potatoes

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares of potatoes were grown in England and the European Community, respectively, *(a)* in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Curry: Following are the figures:

	England	*EC-12*
(a)		
1986	130,400	1,476,400
1987	131,000	1,463,100
1988	134,700	1,392,800
1989	132,200	1,389,500
1990	134,600	[1]—
(b) Average for years between 1979 and 1981 inclusive		
Total	145,800	1,676,900

[1] Not yet available.

Agricultural Workers

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of workers engaged in agriculture in England and the European Community, respectively in 1980, 1985 and 1990, *(a)* in total and *(b)* whole time.

Mr. Curry: The information requested for England is provided in the table. For the European Community farm structure surveys recorded the total number of family and regularly employed non-family workers in the EC10 as follows (millions): 1983, 6·9; 1985, 6·7 and 1987, 6·2; the corresponding figure for EC12 in 1987 was 8·8 million. No reliable analysis of this series distinguishing between full and part-time workers has yet been published, but some details are contained in the Eurostat publication, "Farm Structure, 1987 Survey: main results", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Agriculture Industry (Investment)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of investment by the agriculture industry in *(a)* plant and machinery, *(b)* vehicles, *(c)* buildings and *(d)* works in England in 1979, 1980, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available (i) in cash terms and (ii) at fixed prices.

Mr. Curry: Estimates of the level of new investment for each of the years requested is shown in the table for the categories of investment for which figures are available.

New investment in England *(£ million)*

	Plant and machinery		*Vehicles*		*Buildings and works*	
	(i)	*(ii)*	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(i)*	*(ii)*
1979	369	501	80	125	247	347
1980	321	396	64	88	338	362
1985	449	449	84	84	279	279
1989	347	281	125	92	291	224

(i) Cash terms.
(ii) Fixed 1985 prices.

Regular Family and Hired workers engaged[1] in agriculture in England

as at June	*Total*	*Whole time*
1980	189·7	140·7
1985	172·1	124·7
1990	145·7	100·0

[1] Excluding salaried managers and seasonal and casual.
Source: June Agricultural Census.

Breeding Sows and Gilts

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many breeding sows and gilts there were in England and the European Community, respectively *(a)* in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Curry: Figures requested are as follows:

Breeding sow number in EC and England at December each year *('000 head)*

Year	*England*	*European Community*
1979-81	766	8,924
1986	776	11,086
1987	769	11,298
1988	704	10,635
1989	701	10,887
1990	728	[1]10,892

[1] Provisional as at 1 March 1991.
EC figures are the most complete available but exclude Portugal and Spain for 1979-81. Data from the ex-GDR have been excluded.
Source: Eurostat.

Ewes and Shearlings

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ewes and shearlings there were in England and the European Community, respectively *(a)* in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and *(b)* on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Curry: Ewe and shearling numbers in England and the European Community are as follows:

('000 head)

Year	England	European Community
1979-81	6,380	n.a.
1986	8,306	60,914
1987	8,905	65,536
1988	9,312	[1]70,224
1989	9,530	72,790
1990	9,497	[1]72,205

[1] Provisional as at 1 March 1991.
Source: Eurostat.
Notes:
1. Figures are measured at December each year.
2. Data do not include animals in the former GDR.

Bananas

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) of 13 March, *Official report*, column 567, what percentage of the fruit referred to relates to plantains and what percentage to bananas.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom trade statistics do not differentiate between banana and plantain imports.

Farm Capital Grant Schemes

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to consult interested bodies on changes to the farm capital grant schemes.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have today issued a consultation paper proposing the merger of the farm diversification grant scheme and the farm and conservation grant scheme. Copies are available in the Library of the House. As a result of the merger, the maximum investment on which grant would be claimable for diversification projects would be increased to £40,000 from £35,000 and under the farm and conservation grant scheme, to £85,000 from £74,000. However, the combined investment ceiling under both would not be allowed to exceed £85,000.

In reviewing the scheme I have decided to ask Parliament to abolish the rule that work started without formal acknowledgement of prior notification may not qualify for grant under the farm and conservation grant scheme. A number of farmers who have been penalised for ignoring this rule in their eagerness to deal with pollution problems will now be able to submit fresh claims as soon as the new rules are in force. However, the rule will not be abolished until Parliament has approved the necessary legislation and will remain in force for work carried out under an improvement plan. Farmers are therefore advised to consult the appropriate agriculture department if they are in any doubt as to their eligibility for grant.

Tractors

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tractors were acquired by the agriculture industry *(a)* in total and *(b)* of 40 kW and over, in England, in 1979, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: The information is not available.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Nationalised Industries

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report*, the total contribution by or to the Exchequer to or from each of the then nationalised industries for each year since 1973.

Mr. Mellor: Information is not available in exactly the form requested. Data on central Government subsidies and capital grants to nationalised industries since 1978-79 and on net lending to nationalised industries since 1984-85 are set out in the tables. The tables are consistent with the analyses set out out in the nationalised industries section of the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement (Cm 1520). Corresponding data for earlier years are not readily available.

Subsidies and capital grants to nationalised industries[1]

£ million

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[2]1990-91
BAA plc	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Aerospace	50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Airways	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Coal	171	244	244	335	693	731	1,538	907	825	917	480	3,586	1,806
British Gas Corporation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British National Oil Corporation	—	—	—	—	—	—	67	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Rail	494	641	610	814	846	870	843	849	755	795	556	479	621
British Shipbuilders	11	31	40	46	44	33	17	23	13	10	26	14	3
British Steel Corporation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Telecom	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Transport Docks Board	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Waterways Board	20	23	26	28	38	40	42	43	44	44	46	48	49

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[2]1990-91
Civil Aviation Authority	14	25	36	10	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3
Electricity (England and Wales)	5	6	5	9	28	11	8	5	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity (Scotland)	7	11	16	−4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enterprise Oil	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Girobank	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
London Transport	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	323	295	239	190	287	473
National Bus Company	19	23	24	16	6	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
National Freight Company	14	7	5	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Post Office	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scottish Transport Group[3]	9	10	11	12	8	8	7	8	7	6	5	6	5
Water (England and Wales)	46	62	58	56	64	49	38	29	31	69	24	9	—
TOTAL	860	1,083	1,076	1,326	1,731	1,750	2,563	2,189	1,972	2,083	1,331	4,431	2,961

[1] The figures exclude subsidies and capital grants from local authorities and subsidies and capital grants from central Government which are generally available to the private sector.
[2] Estimated.
[3] Includes Caledonian MacBrayne and the Scottish Bus Group.

Net lending to nationalised industries[1]

£ million

	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[2]1990-91
BAA plc.	−5	−5	—	−39	—	—	—
British Airways	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Coal	261	−400	188	154	447	−2,360	−712
British Gas Corp.	—	—	8	—	—	—	—
British National Oil Corp.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Rail	−21	−23	−22	−106	−22	−30	117
British Shipbuilders	203	66	284	108	118	4	4
British Steel Corp.	667	556	—	—	—	—	—
British Telecom	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Transport Docks Board	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Waterways Board	1	—	1	1	−1	−1	—
Civil Aviation Authority	−10	19	−1	−9	24	50	70
Electricity (England and Wales)	−698	697	−658	−919	−363	−1,335	—
Electricity (Scotland)	−96	−105	−78	294	338	1,059	−133
Enterprise Oil	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Girobank	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
London Transport	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
National Bus Company	−15	−32	−17	−56	23	—	—
National Freight Company	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Post Office	−57	−2	—	—	−170	—	−22
Scottish Transport Group[3]	−1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Water (England and Wales)	−130	−122	387	758	664	396	—
Total	101	650	23	186	1,058	−2,216	−676

[1] Includes issues of public dividend capital.
[2] Estimated.
[3] Includes Caledonian MacBrayne and the Scottish Bus Group.

Building Societies

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what monitoring is being undertaken of the commercial lending exposure of building societies under the Building Societies Act 1986.

Mr. Maples: The Building Societies Commission collects systematic information from building societies and this includes what are known as class 2 assets, which cannot exceed 20 per cent. of all lending. Class 2 covers all mortgage lending except that secured on owner-occupied residential property.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all official documents that are available as guidance for civil service managers considering competitive tendering and contracting out, including guidance on how to compare in-house costs with contractors' bids.

Mr. Mellor: A list of all documents on guidance associated with competitive tendering and contracting out is not held centrally. Detailed guidance on the various aspects of competitive tendering and contracting out, including in-house costs, is contained in CUP guidance

No. 2, issued by the Central Unit on Purchasing (Her Majesty's Treasury). But Departments have the option of enhancing this guidance by issuing their own material. Departments also have access to "Fees and Charges: A Guide for Government Departments" and "Investment Appraisal in the Public Sector: A technical guide for Government Departments", both documents issued by Her Majesty's Treasury.

Taxpayers

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers reside within Derwentside district; and what proportion they are of the post-18 years population;

(2) how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers reside within Wear Valley district; and what proportion they are of the post-18 years population.

Mr. Maude: I regret that estimates of numbers of taxpayers are not available at district level.

Visible Trade Deficit

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the visible trade deficits for each quarter of 1990; and what effect he expects recent reductions in interest rates to have on the United Kingdom balance of trade during the current year.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Visible trade balance

	£ billion
1990	
Quarter 1	−5·9
Quarter 2	−5·3
Quarter 3	−3·7
Quarter 4	−3·0
Total	−17·9

The FSBR forecast is for the visible deficit to fall further this year, to £12 billion.

TRANSPORT

Severn Bridge

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what date, at present rates of toll, payment for the Severn bridge will be completed; what that date would be if tolls increased each year at 3 per cent.; and what the annual income would be estimated to be in the final year *(a)* at present toll rates and *(b)* at 3 per cent. compound increases in toll rates.

Mr. Chope: At present rates of toll it is estimated, making a range of assumptions about future traffic growth and inflation, that the debt of the Severn bridge could be paid off between the years 2008 and 2016 with income in the final year of between £27 million and £29 million. An assumed 3 per cent. per annum increase in tolls would be entirely hypothetical.

London Underground (Overcrowding)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the London Transport report on overcrowding on underground trains.

Mr. Freeman: I have no knowledge of a London Transport report on overcrowding on underground trains. If the hon. Lady is referring to the report on congestion at stations, which was undertaken by independent consultants in 1989, she should address her request to London Transport.

Road Lighting

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will identify any environmental considerations which prevent the lighting of the Swanley-Sevenoaks section of the M25.

Mr. Chope: The decision whether to light the section of M25 motorway between Swanley and Sevenoaks will be based on a comprehensive appraisal of all relevant factors, including a full assessment of the environmental impacts. These will include the appearance of lighting by day and by night and its impact on the quality of the environment in the vicinity. The road safety and economic cost/benefit assessments will also be included.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to light the unlit section of the M4 motorway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We have no plans at present to light unlit sections of the M4. The provision of additional lighting will be considered in conjunction with current planning for widening the M4.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for the M4 motorway in Wales.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has plans to light the unlit sections of the M40 motorway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: It is planned to light the M40 motorway between junctions 4 and 5 by the end of 1991. The provision of additional lighting will be considered in conjunction with planning for widening the M40, at present in hand.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will monitor the volume of traffic on the Swanley-Sevenoaks section of the M25 motorway with a view to installing lighting to improve safety.

Mr. Chope: The traffic volume and night-time accident records are already monitored on the Swanley to Sevenoaks section of M25 motorway so that the case for the installation of lighting can be properly assessed.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the effect of lighting of roads on night-time accidents; and what is his policy on the accident prevention value of lighting of roads.

Mr. Chope: Research in this country and elsewhere has shown that the average reduction in night-time accidents attributable to road lighting is about 30 per cent. There is, however, substantial variation between locations, depending on the type of road and other features. The figure of 30

per cent. is used by the Department for economic assessment of proposed road lighting schemes for motorways and trunk roads.

Traffic Calming

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to extend traffic-calming measures; what are his Department's spending plans for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 for such measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department is actively promoting a number of traffic-calming measures including road humps and 20 mph zones. The responsibility for funding and installing these measures is primarily for local highway authorities. We shall continue to provide advice, guidance and research back-up.

M62

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *195*, what were the reasons for rejection of the alternative solutions to the problems of congestion on the M62 motorway.

Mr. Chope: Widening of the existing motorway is only an interim measure as it will not increase capacity sufficiently to meet projections in traffic growth. Limiting access to the motorway for local traffic would severely increase congestion on local roads. Although public transport—including rail—makes an important contribution it cannot fulfil the needs of more than a small proportion of private and business road users.

MV Breydon (Explosives)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 5 March, *Official Report*, column *90*, what was the ultimate destination of the cargo of explosives carried on MV Breydon; whether there are regular shipments of explosives and ammunition to the Army through Drogheda port; and when the marine accident investigation branch investigation will be completed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The greater part of the cargo was consigned to two commercial concerns, dealing in industrial explosives, in Dublin. The rest was for the Irish Ministry of Defence. The ultimate destination of the consignments is not known; there are regular shipments of explosives through Drogheda. On occasions these include consignments for the Irish Ministry of Defence, and the marine accident investigation branch expects to complete its investigation next month.

Dock Labour Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in relation to the dock labour scheme, he will list, by individual port, *(a)* the estimated number of registered dockers who were expected to leave the industry, given also as a percentatge of the total of registered dockers, *(b)* the estimated contribution from the Government to the redundancy compensation scheme, *(c)* the actual number of registered dockers who have left the industry to date, given also as a percentage of the total of registered dockers and *(d)* the actual contribution from the Government to the redundancy compensation scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government made no estimate before the compensation scheme was introduced either of the likely number of registered dock workers who would be made redundant or of the Government's contribution to their compensation on a port-by-port basis. The number of former registered dock workers at each scheme port who had been made redundant or had been given notice of redundancy by 22 March 1991, and the Government's contribution towards their compensation, are in the table:

Ports	*Number of RDWs made redundant*	*Percentage of RDWs in Port*	*Government contribution*
Aberdeen	149	100	4,921,500
Ardrossan	15	100	250,500
Ayr	14	100	215,250
Barrow	1	12	12,500
Barry	65	100	1,131,500
Blyth	35	67	498,000
Boston	58	67	1,015,000
Bristol	442	91	7,408,500
Cardiff	160	96	2,784,000
Charlestown	1	100	12,500
Clyde	113	89	1,938,500
Dundee	95	100	3,063,500
Falmouth	7	100	114,500
Fleetwood	44	100	741,000
Forth	152	57	2,560,750
Fowey	44	100	770,000
Garston	108	100	2,170,500
Goole	135	82	2,359,000
Great Yarmouth	101	100	2,937,000
Grimsby and Immingham	542	75	14,326,750
Hull	572	84	9,762,500
Ipswich	58	48	1,007,000
Kings Lynn	42	79	735,000
Liverpool	741	58	15,015,000
London	1,158	66	20,526,300
Lowestoft	30	100	340,000
Manchester	162	100	3,435,000
Medway	137	23	2,360,000
Newport	171	84	2,534,500
Par	28	100	484,000
Penzance	8	100	129,000
Plymouth	17	57	297,500
Port Talbot	6	14	105,000
Seaham	10	63	130,750
Sharpness	9	19	157,500
Silloth	1	33	5,500
Southampton	468	69	8,114,500
Sunderland	31	100	524,500
Swansea	81	83	1,335,000
Tees and Hartlepool	490	88	7,551,125
Tyne	81	70	1,383,250
Weymouth	11	100	168,500
Wisbech	11	92	332,500
Workington	10	63	143,000

Highway Maintenance

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional resources, other than those transferred from revenue budgets, he intends to make available for highway structural maintenance on the primary route network.

Mr. Chope: We intend to provide £100 million a year from 1992-93 by way of transport supplementary grant and credit approvals for structural maintenance on the primary route network. The control total for the highways maintenance standard spending assessment for 1992-93 has yet to be decided.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with local authorities about increasing investment in highway structural maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I met representatives of the local authority associations on 18 February. Officials have also had meetings with the associations, most recently on 22 March.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received in favour of his plans to reclassify expenditure on highway structural maintenance on the primary route network as capital expenditure;

(2) what representations he has had from local authority associations on his decision to reclassify expenditure on highway structural maintenance on the primary route network as capital expenditure.

Mr. Chope: Expenditure by local authorities on structural maintenance of roads is expenditure for capital purposes within the meaning of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and, under section 42 of that Act, does not need to be charged to revenue account if credit approvals are used as authority to capitalise it or it is reimbursed out of transport supplementary grant. The local authority associations have criticised our plans to make grant and credit approvals available towards such expenditure. No other representations have been received.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the criteria will be for assessing competing bids for transport supplementary grant for highway structural maintenance on the primary route network.

Mr. Chope: The criteria will take into account the length and structural condition of the roads concerned.

Air Fares

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the percentage increase in air fares likely to arise on routes between the United Kingdom and other European Community countries as a result of higher airport charges and lower income for airlines if the current duty free allowances are withdrawn from such services.

Mr. McLoughlin: The EC has yet to make a decision on whether or not to abolish duty free allowances after 1992. If they were to be abolished, there would be an effect on the income of airport operators and airlines. The time scale of any abolition, the competitive conditions in the market and the commercial response of airport operators and airlines are among the variables which make it impossible to give accurate estimates of any possible effect on air fares.

M27 (Noise Pollution)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will order a survey of noise pollution caused by traffic on the bridge on the M27 over the River Hamble and undertake appropriate noise reduction measures.

Mr. Chope: No; when the secton of the M27 which includes the Hamble bridge was built in the 1970s, all the eligible properties were offered noise insulation in accordance with the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973 and the related Noise Insulation Regulations. Part I of the 1973 Act also enabled eligible residents subsequently to claim compensation for depreciation in value of their property due to physical factors, including noise, attributable to the motorway.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made by Eurotunnel in meeting its obligations under section 19(3) of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987; and what steps he intends to take to ensure that these obligations are fully met by 15 June 1993.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that Eurotunnel is working on plans for the carriage of pedal bicycles and motorcycles through the channel tunnel. Its plans will be subject to operating rules which require the approval of the intergovernmental commission in accordance with clause 13 of the concession agreement.

MV Derbyshire

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, in the light of apparent new material relating to the loss of the Derbyshire, if he will reopen the formal investigation into the loss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The material, which included a paper written by the late Professor Bishop and his colleagues and an underwater film of the Kowloon Bridge, has been examined by the marine accident investigation branch. I have now received the chief inspector's conclusion. He advises, and I have accepted his advice, that the material does not warrant the reopening of the court of formal investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire. The chief inspector has set out his conclusions and the reasons for them in a letter to me, and I am placing a copy in the Library.

I do appreciate the concerns expressed in some quarters about bulk carrier safety. There is currently work going on at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on this topic. The Department of Transport is making a contribution to that work, particularly in the area of investigation into cargo liquefaction. The attention of the International Maritime Organisation will also be drawn to the theories of Professor Bishop and his team.

Driving Licence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to make further changes to the Great Britain driving licence.

Mr. Chope: We have considered this very carefully. We have concluded that there would be considerable benefits in including photographs on driving licences. Technological developments will make the inclusion of photographs on driving licences feasible in a few years at a modest additional cost. Accordingly, we are issuing a consultation document inviting views on the proposals today.

Motorway Distance Limits

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what were the factors that caused him to extend the distance limit for safeguarding purposes beyond 67m from the centre line of the motorway in the case of the two-mile section of the M6 between junction 4 of the M6 and its junction with the M1;

(2) what were the factors that caused him to extend the distance limit for safeguarding purposes beyond 67m from the centre line of the motorway in the case of the 80-mile section of the M1 between junctions 6A and 33.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* In the particular local circumstances where the existing external boundary of the motorway land is more than 67m from the centre line due to the hilly terrain with the inevitable wide embankments and cuttings, and in view of the uncertainty as to how the widening would be carried out, the Department concluded that it needed to be aware of development proposals affecting land within 30m of that boundary.

East Norton Bypass

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department intends to reply to correspondence from Mr. Robert Curnock of Hallaton road, East Norton, Leicestershire and Mr. Edwin de Lisle of Great Easton, Market Harborough, Leicestershire relating to the A47 East Norton bypass, details of which have been sent to his Department.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* An acknowledgement letter was sent to Mr. de Lisle on 1 March. We hope to be able to send a full reply to Mr. de Lisle and Mr. Curnock before the end of March.

M6 (Thornbridge Viaduct)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long work is expected to continue on the Thornbridge viaduct of the M6 motorway; what are the reasons for continuing work; and if he has made any arrangements for his contractors to consult and inform nearby local residents regarding the disturbance from the works.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* Work currently under way for the installation of cathodic protection systems on the viaduct substructure between Beeches road and Thornbridge avenue should be finished by May 1991. A further similar contract south of Thornbridge avenue is expected to start in April 1991 and will last approximately 11 months.

The work is part of the strategy for maintaining the midland links viaducts. In the interests of local residents, work on these contracts is limited to daytime hours.

HEALTH

Fluoridation

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public funding is used to promote fluoridation; and if he will publish a statement detailing the nature and extent of that funding over the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: Regional health authorities are generally responsible for local schemes for water fluoridation. Information on the total cost of these schemes is not available. Some financial assistance is, however, provided from central funds. This amounted to:

	£
1986-87	262,000
1987-88	433,000
1988-89	1,168,000
1989-90	430,000
1990-91	257,784

In addition a grant under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 has been made each year to the British Fluoridation Society as follows:

	£
1986-87	20,000
1987-88	20,000
1988-89	30,000
1989-90	30,000
1990-91	33,000

GP Budgets

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards there are for general practitioners who submit claims for cash-limited budgets in good time where the FHSAs are unable to process payments before the end of the financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Reimbursements from family health services authorities (FHSAs) cash limited budgets for practice staff and premises improvements are made quarterly in arrears although advances equal to an estimated 30 per cent. of the total due are made each month. The full entitlement, less the advance on account, is then paid during the first month of the quarter following that to which the reimbursement relates. The effect is that approximately 10 per cent. of reimbursements due for the final quarter of each financial year are actually paid during the first month of the following financial year. FHSAs should not commit themselves to making payments for practice staff and premises improvements to a value greater than the cash limit available for the year.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have received hearing aids in the Doncaster health authority area in each of the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. J. G. S. Smith, chairman of Doncaster health authority, for details.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Doncaster health authority received lithotripsy treatment in the last 12 months; and how many are still awaiting such treatment.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. Waiting lists are maintained according to the intended specialty of treatment, not by diagnosis or intended method of treatment. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. J. G. S. Smith, chairman of Doncaster health authority, for details.

Female Circumcision

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about female circumcision since 21 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a number of letters expressing concern about the practice of female circumcision, particularly following a recent BBC 2 programme on the subject.

My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State held a meeting on the subject on 4 March 1991. Those present at the meeting were my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), Lord Kennet, Mrs. Efun Dorkenoo of FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development) and officials of the Department.

The Department is to re-issue inter-departmental guidance on inter-agency working in cases of child protection. The new version is being revised to take account of the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and will draw attention to the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985. Consideration will also be given as to how this guidance can be supported with more detailed advice.

Nurses' Grading

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each regional health authority area how many nursing clinical grading appeals have been heard so far at regional level, breaking down the total according to their outcome.

Mr. Dorrell: The information available at 28 February 1991 is given in the table:

Regions	Allowed	Disallowed	Failure to agree	Total
England				
Northern	11	7	42	60
Yorkshire	19	16	20	55
Trent	6	1	17	24
East Anglian	7	—	2	9
North West Thames	13	2	47	62
North East Thames	28	3	51	82
South East Thames	14	2	53	69
South West Thames	34	2	23	59
Wessex	27	—	28	55
Oxford	11	12	141	164
South Western	35	14	72	121
West Midlands	11	2	36	49
Mersey	2	—	29	31
North Western	21	1	42	64
Total	239	62	603	904

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the average cost associated with a single nursing clinical grading appeal hearing at *(a)* district level, *(b)* regional level and *(c)* United Kingdom level.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects nursing clinical grading appeals will be completed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many nursing clinical grading appeals are currently waiting to be heard at *(a)* district level, *(b)* regional level and *(c)* United Kingdom level; and how many appeals have already been completed at each of those levels.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for health when he expects the appeal on grading by nursing auxiliaries at the Alfred Norris unit, Musgrove park hospital, Taunton, to be heard at national level; and to what he attributes the delay in processing this appeal since it was lodged in January 1990.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many clinical grading appeals are outstanding; how many appeals are currently being held on a monthly basis; when he expects the outstanding clinical grading appeals to be completed; how many appointments he has made to the panels dealing with clinical grading appeals; how many panels there are; and what is the remuneration and/or expenses paid to each;

(2) if he will appoint more national appeals panels on clinical grading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Appeals against clinical grading decisions are heard under a complicated and time-consuming procedure agreed by the general Whitley council. When the clinical grading structure was negotiated, we offered to discuss a streamlined procedure for clinical grading appeals, but the nursing trades unions chose not to pursue this possibility.

Under the agreed procedure the management and staff sides of the nursing and midwifery staffs negotiating council are both required to appoint members for each appeal hearing at national level. We are making every effort to process appeals as quickly as possible but future progress will depend on a number of factors, particularly the availability of people who are suitably qualified to hear appeals. Both parties to the dispute meet their own expenses: management side members can claim expenses under normal rules.

There is no information held centrally on district level appeals. The information available on appeals at regional and national level at 28 February is as follows:

	Numbers of appeals received (England)	Number of appeals heard (England)
Regional	1,515	904
National	504	27

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The appeals by nursing auxiliaries at the Alfred Norris unit, Musgrove Park hospital, are likely to be heard at the end of April.

Disabled People

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for implementing the recommendations of the 1988 report on "Information Needs of Disabled People, Their Carers and Service Providers," prepared by Coopers and Lybrand.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This report, which has been widely welcomed, highlighted the importance of improving information services for disabled people and those who care for them. It recommended a three stage strategy:

- —the development of a national framework for the provision of information services to disabled people
- —the creation of local "federations" of information providers, responsive to the needs of the community
- —specific initiatives to develop improved common information services within the context of a national framework sensitive to local needs

In 1990, we commissioned a study by PE International to identify the managerial and resource requirements of implementing such a strategy. Following PEI's conclusions, we now intend to commit £3 million, subject to Parliamentary approval over three years (1991-1994) for a pilot initiative, known as the National Disability Information Projects, with the following objectives:

—Nationally, to promote closer working between organisations which collect and disseminate information of national relevance, with clear objectives to reduce duplication and improve the relevance and accuracy of information.

—Locally, to encourage the development of federations of information providers, in order to achieve greater co-ordination at the local level and to widen access to information.

The national disability information project will build on the achievements of a number of local federations already in existence, including those developed as part of the Oxford regional health authority information project which is supported by the Department of Health.

Dentists

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the number of courses of treatment provided by dentists within the Bromley family health service authority and *(b)* the total monthly sums of money paid to them in respect of January and February; and what were the corresponding figures for the months of January 1990 and February 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not possible to compare on a like-for-like basis the total numbers of courses of treatment in the two years requested. Under the new dental contract introduced in October 1990, national health service treatment of children is provided under a capitation system and does not involve "courses of treatment". The information requested about total fees payable to dentists is provided in the table:

Bromley family health services authority
Total fees scheduled for payment to national health service dentists for the months of January and February in 1990 and 1991

	1990 £	1991 £
January	516,466	484,425
February	443,311	413,103

Blood

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on charging for blood and blood products using blood donated through the blood transfusion service; what is the income from charges for 1990 nationally and in each NHS region; what is the level of charges imposed currently, in 1990, and in 1989; and what was the source of the income from charges, whether inside the NHS, or from private hospitals or from disposals to commercial organisations.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no charges made for blood which is freely donated in this country. The costs of collection, testing, processing, handling and transport, which are incurred in supplying non-NHS hospitals with blood and blood derivatives, are recovered by regional transfusion centres (RTCs). The handling charges for 1989-90 and 1990-91 and the income from the charges for the latest year available are shown in the table. Blood is not supplied to commercial organisations.

The regional health authorities have traditionally allocated funds direct to the RTCs to cover their operating costs. However, from April 1991 those funds will be devolved to the district health authorities and the RTCs will recover their operating costs in proportion to the hospital users demands on the RTC for blood supplies. The reimbursement will not include any element for the freely donated blood itself.

	1989-90 (per unit) £	1990-91 (per unit) £
Buffy coats	16·75	17·50
Cryoprecipitate	11·00	11·50
Filtered blood	32·75	34·50
Fresh frozen plasma for clinical use	13·50	14·25
Fresh frozen plasma for paediatric use	11·25	11·75
Frozen/recovered red cells	22·00	[1]86·00
Leukocyte-poor red cells	19·25	20·25
Paediatric whole blood	31·00	32·50
Plasma reduced blood	17·00	18·00
Concentrated red cells	16·75	18·00
Platelet concentrate	14·50	15·25
Platelet concentrate (Apheresis)	—	46·00
Platelet-rich plasma	11·50	12·00
Red cell compatible blood cells	31·25	32·75
SAG(M) red cells	19·25	20·25
Saline-washed blood red cells	33·25	35·00
Whole blood	29·25	30·75

[1] Note—more accurate costing for this product resulted in an exceptional increase.

Table
Income from handling charges for 1989-90

	£
Northern	21,679
Yorkshire	125,693
Trent	82,111
East Anglia	77,465
North West Thames	631,752
North East Thames	155,634
South East Thames	129,947
South West Thames	463,022
Wessex	383,224
Oxford	104,136
South Western	123,726
West Midlands	208,099
Mersey	27,243
North Western	171,745
TOTAL	2,705,476

Confidentiality

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will issue draft guidance on the confidentiality of personal health information in the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. The Department is currently working on draft guidance on the confidentiality of personal health information in the NHS. This will be issued for consultation shortly.

Children (Employment)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he has received fresh evidence of illegal employment of children supplied by the child employment study carried out by the low pay unit and Birmingham city council; and if he has any plans to issue new guidelines to the Health and Safety Executive to enforce legislation relating to the employment of children;

(2) if he will now seek to implement the Employment of Children Act 1973;

(3) if he has any plans to review the minimum age above which a child may be legally employed;

(4) if he will initiate a review of all legislation affecting the employment of children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are studying the report published by the low pay unit and Birmingham city council in consultation with colleagues in other Departments with responsibility for enforcing current legislation on the employment of children. We shall then consider whether any further action is required to safeguard the welfare of such children.

Drugs (Costs)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will list the actual cost of drugs provided under the national health service per family for each of the years 1980 to 1990; and what each of these costs would have been if there had been no inflation since 1980.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The following table sets out the annual cost of drugs in the national health service in England per head of population *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at 1980-81 prices, for the financial years 1980-81 to 1989-90.

Financial year	*In cash terms* £	*At 1980-81 prices (based on GDP deflator)* £
1980-81	20·48	20·48
1981-82	23·29	21·24
1982-83	26·79	22·81
1983-84	29·81	24·27
1984-85	31·31	24·26
1985-86	33·35	24·50
1986-87	35·89	25·49
1987-88	39·83	26·83
1988-89	44·68	28·05
1989-90	49·40	29·15

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of private residential or nursing homes in each registration authority area which have closed within the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not available centrally for nursing homes. Information about residential homes could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each local authority the number of directly provided care homes for the elderly which have either closed or transferred out of the local authority sector during each year since 1978.

Mr. Dorrell: The information that is available centrally could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Community Care

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the continuing care of the mentally ill in the community after the three years' allocation of the specific grant for the mentally ill has elapsed.

Mr. Dorrell: Consideration will be given to whether the specific grant needs to continue beyond 1993-94 in future public expenditure rounds; in the light of judgments about the adequacy of community care provision for people with a mental illness.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to monitor the use local authorities make of funds allocated for community care to ensure that the money is not used to fund other local authority functions.

Mr. Dorrell: Where resources are specifically allocated to support aspects of community care, the Audit Commission ensures through its audit of local authority accounts that those resources have been used for the purposes for which they were allocated. Additionally, the Department generally calls for reports from authorities on the use that has been made of such resources. For the most part, however, Government support for community care is distributed through the revenue support grant, leaving local authorities free to determine their own expenditure priorities, though the Department receives information from authorities which enables it to monitor expenditure on community care.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to assist local authorities unable to fund the 30 per cent. necessary to claim their entitlement to the specific grant for the mentally ill.

Mr. Dorrell: Local authorities' need to make a 30 per cent. contribution has already been taken into account in their standard spending assessment figure for the personal social services.

SCOTLAND

Salmon

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has of the effect of the North East England licensed net fishery upon Scottish salmon stocks returning to spawn in Scottish rivers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As required by section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986, the report to be presented to Parliament reviewing salmon net fisheries from the Humber to the Ugie will address the issue of adequacy of spawning escapement of salmon in the review area. A good deal of scientific information has been collated on this and other aspects of the review.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the report on East coast salmon netting, as reviewed under section 39(1) of the Salmon Act 1986.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is hoped to present the report to Parliament shortly.

Health Boards

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the occupation of each health board member and the original nominating body of each member not included in his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *574-75*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as set out in the table:

Board	Member	Occupation	Original nominating body, if any
Argyll and Clyde	Mr. N. M. Faccenda	Self Employed, Businessman	Scottish Conservative Party
	Mrs. M. A. Foggie	Housewife, formerly Solicitor	Inverclyde Local Health Council
	Mrs. E. S. Lander	Company Director	CBI
	Mrs. J. C. Le Roux	Housewife	Cancer Research Committee
	Dr. J. Moffat	Consultant Psychiatrist	Royal College of Psychiatrists
	Mr. C. H. Parker	Company Managing Director	CBI
Ayrshire and Arran	Mr. J. Cahill	Maintenance Painter	Cunninghame District Council
	Mr. J. W. G. Donaldson	Self Employed Electrical Engineer	Health Board
	Mrs. A. Dunbar	Teaching Auxiliary	Cunninghame District Council
	Dr. K. G. Fegan	General Medical Practitioner	Health Board
	Mr. W. M. Ritchie	Retired, Managing Director	Health Board
	Mr. I. B. Valentine	Chartered Accountant	Ayr Constituency Conservative Association
Borders	Dr. D. W. Cameron, MBE	General Medical Practitioner	BMA
	Mr. D. A. G. Kilshaw	Solicitor	Health Board
	Miss M. Marshall	Self Employed Businesswoman	Scottish Association for Mental Health
	Mr. J. P. Metcalfe	Retired Company Divisional Chief Executive	Mr. A. C. Purves
	Lady Sanderson	Housewife	Borders Local Health Council
	Mr. R. A. Stewart, MBE	Self Employed Development Officer	BMA: STUC: Health Board
Dumfries and Galloway	Mrs. V. M. I. Jardine-Paterson	Housewife	Sir Hector Monro, MP
	Mr. H. S. McFadzean	Farmer	Health Board
	Mr. W. Seright	Consultant Surgeon	Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh
	Mrs. J. D. Tulloch	Company Director	Health Board: Western Joint Opthalmic Committee
	Dr. A. P. D. Wilkinson	General Medical Practitioner	BMA
	Mr. W. I. Wilson	Chartered Accountant	BMA: Wigtown District Council
Fife	Mrs. S. L. Aitken	Housewife	Mr. Barry Henderson
	Dr. A. C. A. Alexander	General Medical Practitioner	Dr J. B. Gallacher
	Mr. F. J. R. Craig	Company Director	Self
	Dr. C. J. Ingram	University Lecturer	University of St. Andrews
	Mrs. M. Steedman, CBE	Retired Headmistress	Self
	Mr. G. M. Thomson	Company Financial Director	Health Board
Forth Valley	Mr. E. T. M. Bell-Scott	Solicitor	Health Board
	Mr. K. Harding	Self Employed Newsagent	Mr. Michael Forsyth
	Dr. G. B. Hastings	University Academic	Strathclyde University
	Mr. P. A. Joynson	Chartered Surveyor	Scottish Branch British Red Cross Society
	Mrs. K. A. Smith	Vice Chairman Scotland/Emergency Services Organiser, WRVS	Womens Royal Voluntary Service
	Mr. C. S. R. Stroyan	Solicitor	Self
Grampian	Mr. A. B. Broomfield	Company Director/Managing Director	Health Board
	Dr. C. A. Macleod	Company Chairman	Self
	Prof. D. Ogston	Professor of Clinical Medicine	University of Aberdeen
	Mr. J. A. Snedden	Retired Managing Director	Lord Sanderson
	Mr. N. Thornton-Kemsley CBE	Farmer	Lord Sanderson
	Mrs. J. G. A. Wisely, JP	District Councillor	Women into Public Life Campaign
Greater Glasgow	Rev. R. D. M. Campbell	Minister of Religion	
	Mrs. A. Gilchrist	Company Director	
	Lady Goold	Housewife	British Dental Association
	Mr. P. W. Holst	Insulation Contractor	BMA: Western Joint Ophthalmic Committee
	Prof. R. M. Mackie	Professor of Dermatology	University of Glasgow
	Mr. A. Scobbie	Company Managing Director	Self
Highland	Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	Retired Bank Manager	Health Board
	Mr. D. J. Mackay	Company Chief Executive	CBI
	Mrs. A. MacPherson	Housewife	Ross and Cromarty Council of Voluntary Service
	Mr. C. Neilson, JP	Self Employed Businessman	Health Board: Lochaber District Council: Lochaber Local Health Council
	Mrs. S. G. H. Stone	Company Managing Director	Ross and Cromarty District Council
	Mrs. C. Thomson	Housewife	Ross and Cromarty Local Health Council
Lanarkshire	Dr. W. Criggie	General Medical Practitioner	Health Board
	Mrs. A. S. Hinshalwood	Housewife	Health Board
	Mr. I. L. Livingstone	Company Consultant	Health Board

Board	Member	Occupation	Original nominating body, if any
	Mr. R. J. Logan, MBE, JP	Farmer	Health Board
	Mr. J. P. Robinson, JP	Retired Regional Councillor	Strathclyde Regional Council
	Mr. J. Thomson, MBE	Assistant Head Teacher	Voluntary Association for Mental Health
Lothian	Prof. R. C. B. Aitken	Professor of Rehabilitation Studies	University of Edinburgh
	Mrs. G. Barton	Former Nurse and District Councillor	Lothian Regional Council: Edinburgh District Council
	Mr. J. A. Campbell	Company Scottish Manager	
	Mr. R. Findlay	Company Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive	Self
	Cllr. Mrs. M. B. M. Knox	District Councillor	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton
	Mr. G. S. Millar	Community Pharmacist	Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Orkney	Mr. J. Flett	Solicitor	Health Board
	Mr. E. M. Gibson, MBE	Retired Assistant Headmaster	Health Board
	Captain M. Gunn	Ships Master	CBI
	Mrs. E. B. Kerr	Housewife	Orkney Local Health Council
	Mr. J. Rendall	Sub Postmaster/Postman	Voluntary Services Orkney
	Dr. J. S. Walker	General Medical Practitioner	BME
Shetland	Mr. R. R. Bentley	Airport Fire Service	Health Board: Joint Ophthalmic Committee
	Mrs. M. U. Colligan	Retired Teacher	Shetland Islands Council
	Sqd. Ldr. B. P. Gregson	Squadron Leader, RAF	Health Board
	Dr. M. D. Hunter	General Medical Practitioner	BMA
	Mr. R. L. Johnston	Retired Businessman	Health Board
	Miss A. I. Manson	Retail Business Proprietrix	Shetland Islands Council
Tayside	Rev. K. Campbell	Minister of Religion	Health Board
	Mr. D. W. M. Davidson JP	Pharmacist	Area Pharmaceutical Committee
	Mrs. S. H. Fallon	Housewife	Self
	Mr. R. J. Jarvis	Company Group Chief Executive	Self
	Rev. L. E. Luscombe	Primus of Scottish Episcopal Church	Lord Sanderson
	Prof. R. E. Olver	Hon. Consultant Paediatrician	University of Dundee
Western Isles	Mr. J. H. Downie	Retired Market Gardener/Fisherman	Lewis and Harris Local Health Council
	Mr. W. A. Hay	Retired Sales Director	CBI
	Mrs. C. R. MacAskill	Housewife/Seasonal Tourist Officer	Health Board
	Rev. J. A. MacDonald	Parish Priest	Health Board
	Mr. I. D. MacIver	Bank Manager	Health Board
	Mr. A. Matheson	Pharmacist	Western Isles Island's Council

Steel Industry

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total job losses in the steel indulstry in Scotland in each financial year since 1978-79.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows total annual average employment in the Scottish steel industry, in plants with 11 or more employees, for each year between 1979 and 1989 (the latest year for which data are available).

Employment in steel industry in Scotland 1979-1989

Year	Thousand
1979	20·0
1980	18·3
1981	14·9
1982	13·4
1983	10·7
1984	9·5
1985	9·3
1986	8·1
1987	7·4
1988	7·4
1989	7·4

Source: Scottish Office Industry Department. Regional Data System.

Nurses' Grading

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdwon of the total number of nursing clinical grading appeals already heard at national level, stating how many resulted in an appeal being upheld, rejected or a failure to agree.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In Scotland 461 appeals have been heard at Scottish appeals committee level; 150 have been upheld, 167 rejected and in 144 cases the committee failed to reach agreement. In Great Britain 71 appeals from Scotland have been lodged with the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council and appropriate arrangements for determining their outcome are being made.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the average cost associated with a single nursing clinical grading appeal hearing at *(a)* board level, *(b)* national level and *(c)* United Kingdom level.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the average cost of a clinical grading appeal at board, national and United Kingdom level is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish nursing clinical grading appeals are currently waiting to be heard at *(a)* board level, *(b)*

national level and *(c)* United Kingdom level; and how many appeals have already been completed at each of those levels.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of nurse clinical grading appeals currently waiting to be heard and the number of appeals completed at board level is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. At Scottish appeals committee level 1,925 appeals were waiting to be heard and 461 had been completed at 1 March. No information is held on the total number of appeals lodged at United Kingdom level but in Great Britain as at 28 February, 602 appeals were lodged (71 from Scotland) of which eight have been heard (none from Scotland) and 589 are currently waiting to be heard.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Appeals against clinical grading decisions are heard under a complicated and time-consuming procedure agreed by the General Whitley Council and future progress will depend on a number of factors, particularly the availability of people who are suitably qualified to hear appeals. Consequently it is not possible to estimate when nurse grading appeals will be completed.

There is no information held centrally on board level appeals. The information available on appeals at Scottish appeals committee level and national (Great Britain) level is as follows:

	Number of Appeals Received (Scotland)	*Number of Appeals heard (Scotland)*
Scottish Appeals Committee	nearly 2,500	461
Great Britain	71	None

Liver Transplants

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to establish a liver transplant facility in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Our priority has been to establish a heart transplant unit in Scotland and we expect the first operations to be carried out at the end of this year in Glasgow royal infirmary.

Social Work Supervision Orders

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons aged under 16 years were placed on social work supervision orders in *(a)* Dundee, *(b)* Tayside and *(c)* Scotland in each of the past five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of children aged 0-17 years, who were under supervision requirements at 31 March each year, are set out in the table:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Dundee	237	260	307	357	322
Tayside	453	476	521	549	525
Scotland	8,099	8,582	8,333	8,387	8,533

Secure Accommodation

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places in secure accommodation there are for persons aged under 16 years in Scotland; and where they are located.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Secure Unit	*Region*	*Number of Places*
Rossie School Montrose	Tayside	25
St. Mary's Kenmure School Glasgow	Strathclyde	24
Kerelaw School Stevenston	Strathclyde	24
Howdenhall Children's Unit Edinburgh	Lothian	5
Rimbleton House Glenrothes	Fife	2
Weedingshall Youth Care Centre, Polmont	Central	2
Closeburn Assessment Centre, Closeburn	Dumfries and Galloway	2

List D Schools

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of places available in list D schools in Scotland in each of the past 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will indicate the average occupancy rate of these places in each year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The list D category was abolished from 1 April 1986. The relevant information up to 1986 is as follows:

Year	*Available places*	*Occupancy rate (Per cent.)*
1980	1,509	86
1981	1,514	80
1982	1,349	77
1983	1,203	79
1984	1,099	78
1985	1,107	65
1986	857	75

The latest information on establishments used by local authorities for residential care after 1986 (including former list D schools) is set out in the statistical bulletin R6/1989 on "Residential Accommodation 1988", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names and locations of list D schools in Scotland which are *(a)* currently operating and *(b)* have closed down during the past 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The list D category was abolished from 1 April 1986, when local authorities assumed full funding responsibility for young people placed in residential care. Such establishments are required to be registered by local authorities. The following former list D schools are still operating:

Kibble, Paisley
Wellington, Penicuik
Geilsland, Beith
Oakbank, Aberdeen
Kerelaw, Stevenston
Snowdon, Stirling
St. Mary's Kenmure, Glasgow
Ballikinrain, Glasgow
Balrossie, Kilmacolm
St. Joseph's, Tranent
St. Philip's, Airdrie
St. John's, Glasgow
Balnacraig, Perth
Rossie, Montrose

The following establishments closed since March 1980:

Loaningdale, Biggar
St. Andrew's, Shandon
Dr. Guthrie's Boys, Edinburgh
Dr. Guthrie's Girls, Edinburgh
Langlands Park, Port Glasgow
Dale, Arbroath
Thornly Park, Paisley
Tynepark, Haddington
St. Ninian's, Gartmore
St. John Bosco's Aberdour
Balgowan, Dundee
Balgay, Dundee

Therapy in Schools

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to local education authorities concerning the provision of speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and the teaching of dyslexic children in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy may be special educational needs of children for which education authorities have responsibility under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. In such cases authorities usually make arrangements for health boards to make the necessary provision. Guidance on the identification, assessment and recording of special educational needs was given in circular 1087 issued on 9 December 1982.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware from the answer I gave him on 27 June 1990 that my Department has commissioned a research study which will offer guidance to teachers about the needs of children with specific learning difficulties. A report is expected in early 1992.

Cancer Screening Unit

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in supplying a mobile breast cancer screening unit at Woodside place, Glasgow to cover the Argyll and Clyde and Western Isles health boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The first mobile unit, operating from Woodside place, Glasgow, began screening women in the Argyll and Clyde health board area on 15 August 1990. Several districts have been completed and screening will begin in Oban on 22 April 1991, with the mobile unit subsequently moving to Mull and Lochgilphead. The opportunity will be available to women from nearby islands to be screened at that time.

Screening is expected to take place in the Western Isles during autumn 1992.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in supplying a mobile breast cancer screening unit in Inverness to cover the Highland health board area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The mobile unit will operate from the static screening and assessment centre at Raigmore, Inverness and is currently undergoing final maintenance and equipment checks.

The intention is for the static and mobile screening service to begin screening in early summer.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women on average are screened at a mobile breast cancer screening unit in one year; and what is the cost of running one such unit and the number of units currently operational, by health board area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are six mobile breast cancer screening units currently operating in Scotland. The information on costs and numbers screened is not available as the service is not yet fully operational.

Industrial Sites

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on trends in the supply of fully serviced industrial sites in the past two years.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The nearest equivalent information, available from the industrial sites register (the joint annual register of industrial land) is on sites which are immediately available or could be made available within one year. The data for 1985 to 1989 are as follows:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Area (hectares)	2,567	2,814	3,337	2,743	2,821
Number of sites	535	534	549	567	629

The 1989 survey is still being analysed, and figures may be liable to adjustment. The 1990 survey is under way.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much provision of fully serviced industrial sites has been made available by (i) Scottish new towns, (ii) Scottish Development Agency, (iii) Highland and Islands Development Board and (iv) Scottish local authorities, in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested, but the following table may be helpful:

Provision for industrial sites in Scotland

		1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
New town development corporations[1]	£'000s	Not available				3,300	2,400	3,300	3,500	3,400	4,400
	Land owned[3]					569	540	540	538	557	NYA
SDA[2]	£'000s	Not available					2,677	2,044	1,969	3,796	4,802
	Site numbers						29	18	21	19	14
	Land owned[3]					410	397	366	463	483	NYA
HIDB	£'000s	4,600	4,800	7,200	5,300	6,300	4,200	2,800	4,100	6,600	7,400
	Site numbers	6	9	8	4	7	8	6	6	7	8
	Land owned[3]					39	35	36	44	57	NYA
Local authorities[2]	£'000s	8,225	9,243	11,511	9,887	13,077	15,437	15,488	17,091	17,738	17,415
	Land owned[3]					1,741	1,988	2,046	[4]1,305	1,803	NYA

[1] These figures relate to site development work only.
[2] These figures relate to total expenditure on factory building and industrial sites. Returns do not allow for site only information to be supplied.
[3] These figures (in hectares) are for land owned by the agencies and bodies shown and identified for industrial purposes. It includes both fully serviced and unserviced sites. The data is as published in the Industrial Sites Register. The data is as at 31 March for the year concerned, thus the 1,741 hectares shown for local authorities in the 1984-85 column shows the picture at 31 March 1985.
[4] The drop in the local authority entry for 1988 is explained by the introduction of new marketability criteria, as detailed in the published Commentary on the Industrial Sites Register 1988.
NYA—Not yet available.

High-technology Premises

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what high-technology premises are being planned or supplied for Scotland and by when.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The supply of premises for high-technology companies is not monitored. The industrial sites register does not specifically record sites suitable for high-technology companies, and it would not be feasible to do so. Existing premises may often be sufficient to meet the needs of many such companies.

ENVIRONMENT

Audit Commission

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who is responsible for auditing the work of the Audit Commission.

Mr. Key: Paragraph 12 of schedule 3 to the Local Government Finance Act 1982 requires the Commission to keep proper accounts and other records; to prepare a statement of account in respect of each financial year in the form directed by the Secretary of State; and submit the statement to him by the date he directs. The Secretary of State is required, on or before 30 November in each year, to transmit the statement of account to the Comptroller and Auditor-General who is required to examine and certify the statement of account and lay copies before Parliament with his report on it.

Leisure Centres

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has plans to ensure that local authorities who run leisure and entertainment complexes shall be required to publish at one and the same time capital and revenue accounts for each undertaking.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Local Authorities (Tendering)

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what safeguards there are in the local authority competitive tendering process to ensure that the terms and conditions of the tender are not subsequently varied by mutual consent.

Mr. Key: Under part I of the Local Government Act 1988, local authorities must comply with a number of tendering requirements if they wish to use their own work-forces to carry out defined activities after dates set out in subordinate legislation. One of these requirements is that, in carrying out the work, they must comply with the detailed specification which was prepared as the basis for competitive tendering, although this will normally provide limited scope for some variation in the work to be done. The Secretary of State has sanction powers under the 1988 Act which he may use if he considers that an authority has failed to comply with the statutory requirements.

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the city of Sheffield the number of projects which were not given approval for 1991-92 under the urban programme, indicating the nature of the projects rejected and giving a percentage figure, and a cash value figure, which related to the ethnic minority community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Sheffield urban programme for 1991-92 includes 105 new projects, of which 83 were approved on 1 March. The 22 projects which could not be approved have a total value of £1,035,000 and include five projects relating to the ethnic minority community costing £530,000.

My Department met Sheffield city council on 20 March and the council is now working up information on most of the 22 rejected projects in order to resubmit them. Any attempt to assess the number of projects finally rejected would therefore be premature.

Industrial Waste

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to make available to the public information concerning the nature of industrial waste being dumped in any given local authority area.

Mr. Baldry: Waste disposal plans drawn up and published by waste disposal authorities should give a picture of the industrial waste arising and where it goes for disposal within each authority's area.

The deposit of industrial waste is illegal unless authorised by a licence from the waste disposal authority under part I of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Waste disposal authorities must keep registers of all such licences open to the public. Each licence shows the types of waste permitted at each site. Under section 64 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the information to be kept on public registers will be greatly expanded. The extent of this information will be prescribed in regulations on which my Department will be consulting publicly before the implementation of section 64.

Individual records are kept of the transport and disposal of the most difficult and harmful wastes, designated as special waste under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. These records are copied to waste disposal authorities. In a consultation paper ("Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Special Waste Regulations 1980, a Consultation Paper, Special Waste and the Control of its Disposal") issued by my Department and the Welsh Office last year, the Government proposed that registers of special waste records should be open for public inspection.

Climate Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the inclusion of a commitment to the precautionary principle in the climate convention currently under inter-governmental negotiation.

Mr. Baldry: Negotiations for a framework convention on climate change are taking place under an inter-governmental negotiating committee established by the United Nations General Assembly. The United Kingdom is playing an active role in the negotiations and we hope that the convention will include an expression of the need for precautionary action in the face of serious or irreversible threats of environmental degradation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the specific grant received by each local authority in respect of *(a)* community charge rebate and *(b)* transitional relief for the year 1990-91.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for the available information for 1990-91 to be placed in the Library of the House. I shall be in a position to publish a final figure for the amount of transitional relief given when local authorities submit their final grant claims later this year.

Water Pollution

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those rivers in England where prosecutions have been undertaken because of pollution; who were the polluters; what fines were levied; and what remedial measures were ordered in each case to prevent a recurrence of the pollution.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held centrally. The National Rivers Authority is responsible for enforcing water pollution controls, and is empowered to carry out operations to prevent or remedy pollution where appropriate.

I understand that the authority brought a total of 370 prosecutions for water pollution offences in England and Wales during its first year of operation to 31 August 1990.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards control of the dumping of rubbish and other pollutants from private boats in estuaries and inshore waters.

Mr. Baldry: Under the provisions of the 1989 Water Act it is an offence to cause or knowingly permit the entry of polluting or solid waste matter to "controlled waters", (which include estuaries and inshore waters), although the discharge of trade or sewage effluent from a vessel is excluded from these controls. The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1988, which extend to private boats, impose restrictions on the disposal of garbage, defined as all kinds of victual, domestic and operational waste, into the sea. The Merchant Shipping (Reception Facilities for Garbage) Regulations 1988 require every harbour authority in the United Kingdom to provide facilities for receiving garbage from ships.

The Gulf (Birds)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he is giving to the International Council for Bird Preservation and RSPB reports on the Gulf birds.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* As I indicated to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 15 March at column *1392,* I very much welcome the initiative taken by the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) in sending two experts to the Gulf earlier this month.

The ICBP has now prepared a proposal for further work to survey the spring migration in the Gulf in April and May. We have been interested to see this and will consider it carefully and I understand that ICBP has discussed the proposal with the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development in Saudi Arabia.

Oil-skimming Equipment, Bahrain

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who supplied and manufactured the oil skimming equipment handed over by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in Bahrain last week.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* The equipment was supplied by DESMI Ltd. from its factory in Newcastle, Staffordshire. These particular items were manufactured in Denmark by DESMI's parent company, A/S De Smithske, and use major United Kingdom components, particularly engines made by Lister Diesels, hydraulic equipment from Hamworthy Ltd. of Poole, Dorset, and valves manufactured by Chalwyn Valves Ltd.

Recycling Credits

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress in the introduction of recycling credits.

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to the answer, 30 January 1991, c. 537]:* The Touche Ross report on recycling credits commissioned by my Department has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. We will publish draft regulations and guidance on the calculation and payment of recycling credits for consultation with local authorities in due course, taking account of the advice we have received.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 26 March 1991

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the number of people who have disappeared in Sri Lanka in the last three years; how many detainees are held by the Sri Lankan Government under emergency laws; what recent representations he has made to the Sri Lankan authorities on human rights abuses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Reliable information is not available on the number of people who have disappeared or the number of detainees. We continue regularly to raise with the Sri Lankan Government our concerns about their human rights performance and the conduct of their security forces in dealing with the serious terrorist challenge they face.

Iraq (Humanitarian Assistance)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to Iraq via the European Community, the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations agencies, and other relief agencies.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom supports the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations relief agencies in Iraq. This year we have already given £2·5 million to the ICRC's Gulf appeal and US $1 million to the United Nations appeal co-ordinated by UNDRO. In addition, the EC Commission has given £8·75 million to support the relief activities in the Gulf region. The share of this attributable to the United Kingdom's aid budget is £1·75 million. All these funds are available for use in Iraq.

In the light of reports from the ICRC and United Nations Under-Secretary-General Ahtisaari, the United Nations sanctions committee, with full British support, has now made a general determination that humanitarian circumstances apply with respect to the entire civilian population of Iraq in all parts of Iraq's national territory and that the civilian and humanitarian imports identified in Mr. Ahtisaari's report, which are integrally related to the supply of foodstuffs and supplies intended for medical purposes, should be allowed with immediate effect.

TRANSPORT

Motorway Lighting

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of motorway there are in England and Wales; and what proportion of these are lit.

Mr. Chope: There are 1,640 miles of trunk motorway in England. About 30 per cent. of this length is lit. The Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for motorways in Wales.

Air Traffic Distribution

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which British-owned airlines were consulted prior to his recent announcement about traffic distribution rights at Heathrow airport; what steps he took to ensure that airlines flying services from Britain's regional airports could continue to do so; if he has discussed the allocation of Air UK's original slots with the Heathrow airport scheduling committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Member will be able to obtain from the CAA the names of the 54 United Kingdom airlines it consulted prior to offering advice on the need for the London traffic distribution rules. My right hon. and learned Friend explained in his statement of 5 March that removal of the rules did not impose any requirement on the operators of regional services to give up operating at Heathrow, and noted the existence of safeguards against unreasonable discrimination in an airport's trade practice or pricing policy. My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed with the Heathrow scheduling committee the allocation of slots previously used by Air UK, as the Government are not involved in the slot allocation process.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from British Northern Airlines about his Heathrow traffic distribution decisions and that airline's application to the Heathrow airport scheduling committee.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations from British Northern Airlines, although its concern to secure slots at Heathrow has been drawn to our attention by others. That is a matter for discussion between the airlines and the Heathrow scheduling committee.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his decision on allocation of airlines to Heathrow in the light of the refusal by the Heathrow airport scheduling committee to allocate the slots previously used by Air UK to British Northern Airlines.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to review his decision to remove restrictions on access to Heathrow. The allocation of slots at the airport is the responsibility of the scheduling committee, which follows guidelines drawn up by the International Air Transport Association. The Government are not involved in the allocation process.

Holidaymakers (Consumer Protection)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Association of British Travel Agents over extending consumer protection for all holidaymakers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Consumer protection matters in general, including package holidays, are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry; I

understand that the Association of British Travel Agents has had discussions with Ministers in his Department recently.

The Association of British Travel Agents has also written recently to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, supporting his request to the Civil Aviation Authority, as announced in his statement to the House on 11 March, for advice on possible arrangements to give financial protection to scheduled air passengers; air charter holidaymakers are already protected by the statutory bonding scheme for air travel organisers, and by the Air Travel Trust.

Offshore Standby Vessels

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *639*, when his Department's latest standard for standby vessels will be applied to all such vessels.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest standard is expected to be published in April. New ships will be required to comply in full, but in view of the significant changes that are to be made there will be a staged introduction for existing ships.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to change the record keeping by his Department to enable him to know when standby vessels are on station in the North sea.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since early 1990 most owners have been providing on a weekly basis information on the locations and time their vessels are on station as a check on the periods of duty at offshore installations. When the revised code is published next month this information will be sought on a voluntary basis for all standby vessels. In his report on the Piper Alpha disaster Lord Cullen recommended that the owners of standby vessels should be required to notify the regulatory body weekly as to the locations and functions of their vessels in the ensuing week. This will of course be a matter for the Health and Safety Commission once responsibility has been transferred to it.

Drivers (Working Hours)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to introduce regulations to restrict the working of excessive hours by taxi and private hire drivers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government will be consulting trade organisations to establish whether the working of excessive hours is a widespread problem, posing a serious safety hazard. If it is, we shall have to identify appropriate remedial measures.

Goole Port

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many registered dock workers there were at the port of Goole for each of the years from 1985 to 1990; and how many of those dock workers are currently employed following the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of dockers registered at the port of Goole at the end of each year 1985 to 1988 and at 3 July 1989 when the dock labour scheme was abolished were as follows:

Numbers of registered dockworkers

Year	Numbers
1985	189
1986	169
1987	169
1988	165
3 July 1989	164

I have no information about how many of these are currently employed following abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the total tonnage of exports and imports handled by the port of Goole in each year since 1985.

Mr. McLoughlin: Annual tonnages of foreign trade handled at the port of Goole since 1985 are as follows:

Thousand tonnes

	Exports	Imports	Total
1985	478	817	1,295
1986	369	909	1,278
1987	432	1,265	1,697
1988	497	1,603	2,100
1989	407	1,423	1,829
[1]1990	354	1,242	1,596

[1] Provisional.

Highway Maintenance

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the long-term cost of financing highway structural maintenance on the primary route network through capital rather than revenue expenditure will be reduced or increased as a result of the changes proposed by his Department.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The benefits of structural maintenance are primarily felt in future accounting periods. To compare the real cost of financing by means of borrowing and the cost of charging expenditure direct to revenue account, it is necessary to discount the nominal value of cash payments in future years to reflect the time intervals before they are made. The result of the comparison will depend on the rate of discount and the rate of interest.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances and for what reasons the Government record whether persons admitted to the United Kingdom are serving members of their armed forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Where relevant to the person's claim for admission, such information would be recorded on the landing card. However, landing cards are not completed for members of forces who are exempted from immigration control under section 8 of the Immigration Act 1971.

Life Sentences

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is now in a position to make a statement about the Thynne, Wilson and Gunnell case following the European Court of Human Rights judgment.

Mrs. Rumbold: The implications of the European Court's judgment require full and careful consideration; we will put our proposals to Parliament as soon as we are able to do so.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department is issuing to local authorities in connection with the Children Act 1989.

Mr. John Patten: None, but extensive guidance has been issued by the Department of Health which has responsibility for this Act.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to protect the rights of those who do not wish to work or open their place of work on a Sunday, to remove the anomalies of the present Sunday trading laws and to replace the present legislation with a formula which allows limited shopping.

Mrs. Rumbold: The terms and timing of fresh legislation on Sunday trading remain to be determined, but our aim is that such legislation should be workable, enforceable and enjoy both popular and sufficient parliamentary support. Separate discussions to which I have invited the major groups interested in reform of the Sunday trading law may help to identify what particular provisions might satisfy these criteria.

Plastic Explosives

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Montreal agreement on the chemical labelling of plastic explosives.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on 20 March 1991 at columns *113-14*.

Security Firms

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans for the registration of security firms and the establishment of minimum training requirements.

Mr. John Patten: We are considering a range of options for improving the regulation of the private security industry.

Immigration Rules

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make changes in the immigration rules.

Mr. Peter Lloyd [*pursuant to his reply, 25 January 1991, c. 354*]: My right hon. Friend is laying before Parliament today an immigration rules change to introduce a visa requirement for all citizens of Uganda with effect from 2 April.

Ugandans currently account for nearly one in 10 of all asylum applications in the United Kingdom and their numbers have risen sharply over a period in which there is general agreement that respect for human rights in Uganda has substantially improved. The introduction of a visa requirement should benefit all bona fide travellers who will be less likely to encounter delays on arrival in this country. Our entry clearance unit in Kampala is being strengthened to ensure an efficient service. Regular visitors to this country will be eligible for multiple entry visas.

ENVIRONMENT

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last issued guidance to owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest under the provisions of section 33 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and whether such guidance reflects the changes in SSSI notification procedures introduced in the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985.

Mr. Trippier: A code of guidance for sites of special scientific interest was published in 1982 and we shall be revising it later this year. Advice is also given in departmental circulars and in the Nature Conservancy Council's publication "Sites of Special Scientific Interest".

"This Common Inheritance"

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the timetable he has set for the implementation of the policy objectives set out in the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance".

Mr. Trippier: Our White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", published on 25 September last year, was the first comprehensive statement of environmental policies and objectives by any United Kingdom Government. Over the last six months we have worked hard, proving that the White Paper means action, not just words. Thanks to the drive and commitment of the Government across the whole range of their activities, getting on for 100 White Paper initiatives have borne fruit so far.

In the field of investment, I announced last November an increase of 33 per cent., or £130 million, in planned expenditure for 1991-92 on protecting and improving the environment. This provided extra resources for purposes including environmental research, the countryside, the heritage, housing and urban initiatives, pollution control and waste disposal and recycling.

The Government have set up new institutions, including a permanent committee of Cabinet Ministers to consider environmental policies and follow up and roll forward the initiative taken by the White Paper. Each Government Department has nominated a Minister to consider the environmental implications of all of its policies and programmes. The first round of new annual departmental reports, many reporting at length on environmental initiatives, has been published. The first meeting of a new local government environmental forum

has been held, and arrangements have been made to set up similar new fora involving business and the voluntary sector. In Europe, Britain has proposed amendments to the EC treaties to give the Community clearer competence on environmental matters and launched an initiative to promote the integration of the environment with other areas of Community policy.

In the field of planning, a consultation paper has been issued on tighter controls over agricultural and forestry buildings. The Department of the Environment has published a report and consultation paper on the protection of hedgerows. The planning Bill has been introduced, with proposals which will implement many of the improvements described in the planning chapter of the White Paper. A consultation paper has been issued giving proposals for the application of environmental assessment to private Bills. New guidance has been published on subjects including archaeology and planning, the interaction of planning and transport and planning aspects of the extraction of cement.

In the field of environmental technology, waste minimisation and recycling, the Department of Trade and Industry in conjunction with the Department of the Environment has launched the new £12 million environmental technology innovation scheme as well as its own environmental management options scheme. An extra £60 million over three years has been announced to upgrade and replace municipal incinerators. A further £31 million will be available over the same period to help authorities improve standards at landfill sites, transfer stations and civic amenity sites and £40 million of resources will be available to enable authorities to invest in effective recycling schemes. The derelict land programme for 1991-92 has been increased by £15 million.

Research projects have been commissioned on recycling building waste and waste from quarries and mines. Studies to monitor the results of pilot recycling projects in a number of cities have been commissioned. The Department of the Environment and the Scottish Office have announced the introduction of a new system of registration for carriers of waste. At present, local authorities are responsible both for disposing of waste themselves and for regulating the way in which others do so. The DOE has issued draft circulars for local authorities on arrangements to separate these functions by the formation of new local authority waste disposal companies. In line with the United Kingdom's policy, a recommendation on international self-sufficiency in waste management has been adopted by the OECD. Extra resources have been announced by the Department of the Environment for improving local authority disposal and recycling facilities, and a code of practice has been issued on standards of cleanliness in public places and the best means of dealing with litter.

In the fields of pollution control and air quality, a practical guide has been published to the system of integrated pollution control through which the Government have given a new push to the process of designing out pollution problems from the most potentially polluting processes. Detailed regulations have been laid to implement both these controls and the supplementary air pollution controls by local authorities. The Government have achieved agreement in the EC on standards for new large diesel engines. A new advisory group on medical aspects of air pollution episodes has been announced by the Department of Health. The Department of the Environment has produced a model describing critical loads of air pollution—the loads that a particular environment can tolerate without adverse effects—and has also announced funding for an expanded air quality monitoring network and new arrangements to provide information on air pollution for weather bulletins. As from 1 April, 25 process guidance notes will be published covering processes for local authority pollution control.

The Chancellor, in the Budget, raised the duty on petrol and derv by 15 per cent., substantially above inflation. With the VAT increase in April the tax differential between leaded and unleaded petrol will rise to 4p a litre, giving a further boost to unleaded, whose market share has risen from 30 to 39 per cent. over the last year. The Budget also put up employers' national insurance contributions on company cars and raised income tax on car sales by a further 20 per cent.

Also in the field of transport, the agreement that the Government have been pressing for on a consolidated directive applying to emissions from cars of all sizes has been reached. From November this year an emissions check will be included in the MOT test. A Road Traffic Bill has been introduced by the Department of Transport which contains provisions to improve the enforcement of speed limits. The first pilot "red route" scheme has been introduced. Plans have been announced for six demonstration projects on the best way to integrate bypasses with traffic management schemes.

As for the countryside, a start has been made on planting a new national forest in the midlands. Extra funds have been announced for national park authorities, the Countryside Commission and the Groundwork Trust. Proposals have been announced for additional planning control safeguards over sites of special scientific interest. Agriculture departments in England and Wales have gone out to consultation on a draft code embodying new advice on best practice to reduce agricultural water pollution. My right hon. Friend has announced that he proposes to revoke a deemed planning permission to develop housing on the edge of Canford heath, a site of acknowledged international importance for nature conservation.

Internationally, the Government have continued to make a major contribution to efforts to agree a global convention on climate change and to work for a successful United Nations conference on environment and development in 1991. In the field of overseas assistance, the Government announced in November 1990 a new public expenditure sub-programme, separate from the budget for aid for developing countries, on global environmental assistance. For this, the Government have pledged £40 million to the global environment facility being established under the leadership of the World bank, UNDP and UNEP to help developing countries tackle global environmental problems.

In the field of energy, the Government are drawing up plans for a major publicity campaign and extra research on domestic energy efficiency. The Department of Energy's new home energy efficiency scheme has been launched. The Department of the Environment has launched a pilot programme of energy efficiency measures in local authority housing. The Department of Energy has announced a £4 million increase in research into renewable energy. With the active participation of the United Kingdom, the second world climate conference in Geneva agreed the basic shape of a global strategy on climate

change. Thanks in no small part to the Department of Energy's efforts, obsolete EC rules that made it harder than it need be to switch to gas from more polluting fuels for generating electricity have been repealed, and a new ministerial committee has been established to oversee all aspects of energy efficiency.

In the field of the heritage, state funds are to be available for the first time for the repair of historic cathedrals. The scheme will be launched on 3 April. A total of £11·5 million of new money has been set aside for grants for cathedrals over this and the next two years.

In the field of water, to help reduce water pollution regulations have been introduced setting standards for farm waste facilities and oil stores. A total of £23 million extra grant in aid for the National Rivers Authority has been announced. The maximum fines for water pollution in magistrates courts have been increased tenfold to £20,000; the fines in Crown courts are unlimited.

In the field of noise, the report of the Government's noise review working party has been issued for consultation.

In the field of wider environmental knowledge, the Department of the Environment has issued its detailed consultation paper on its proposed new, more comprehensive environmental statistical report. Consultation with industry and consumer groups is continuing on the outlines of a new eco-labelling scheme. A new leaflet—"Wake Up To What You Can Do For The Environment"—has been published and widely distributed to tell individuals how they can help.

In Scotland, legislation has been introduced establishing Scottish Natural Heritage. A project team has been appointed to bring the Government's new rural enterprise programme into operation. A fuller list of Scottish Office achievements is in its press notice also issued today.

In Wales, £41 million funding was announced for the Welsh Development Agency's initiatives "Landscape Wales" and "Urban Development Wales" in 1991-92, with £7 million urban programme support for environmental improvements. An environmental competition for schools is being run with £5,000 cash prizes donated by Welsh Water plc.

In Northern Ireland, work has started on a code to support the Government's new countryside management strategy. Core funding has been announced for the establishment of a regional Tidy Britain Group office in Belfast, and a consultation paper has been issued on energy efficiency in Northern Ireland. An Environment Week will also be held at the end of April.

This is only a selection of the very wide range of action that the Government have in hand in order to push ahead with their environmental strategy. Vigorous action will continue, not only to fulfil the individual commitments made in the White Paper, but to roll forward the process of addressing tomorrow's environmental challenges. With co-operation from everyone—individuals, as well as local authorities, businesses, schools and voluntary organisations—I am confident that those challenges can be met with courage and success.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the individuals and organisations being consulted in the process of completion of the statistical report on the environment being prepared as a result of a commitment in "This Common Inheritance".

Mr. Trippier: Around 250 organisations have been consulted and 94 written responses have been received by my Department. A list of consultees and those organisations from which written responses have been received has today been placed in the Library of the House.

Doncaster (Grants)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount per head of revenue support grant, area protection grant, inner London education special grant and of all grants payable to Doncaster metropolitan borough council for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The available information for Doncaster MBC for 1991-92 is as follows:

	£/Head of relevant population
RSG	226
Area Protection Grant	80

In addition after the enactment of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, Doncaster MBC will receive payment of £140 for each personal community charge paid or, in the case of standard or collective charges, equivalent.

Information on the amounts of transitional relief grant, community charge benefit grant and specific grants payable to Doncaster MBC in 1991-92 is not available.

"Wake Up To What You Can Do For The Environment"

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of his departmental leaflet, "Wake Up To What You Can Do For The Environment" have been printed; what plans exist for additional print runs; how the leaflet is being distributed and to which target audiences; how much the printing and distribution has cost to date; and whether any external consultants were involved in the design and content of the leaflet.

Mr. Baldry: Five million copies of the leaflet have been printed; additional print runs will depend upon demand. The leaflet is being distributed through supermarkets with the generous assistance of Tesco, Sainsbury's, the Co-op, Safeway and Asda; and at the Department's stand at the ideal home exhibition. Local authorities have been invited to assist in distribution; and copies are available on request from the Department. The target audience for the leaflet is the general public. Printing and distribution have cost £180,000 to date. Consultants were commissioned to conduct market research on a pilot version of the leaflet, and the leaflet was designed by outside contractors.

Common Land

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring forward new common land legislation in pursuance of the recommendations of the Common Land Forum in 1986 and the policy statement made by the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 26 July 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: It remains our policy, as stated by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside

on 26 July 1990, to safeguard the status of common land and to strengthen the ways in which we protect and use it. We recognise that this requires legislation to implement it, and the importance of such legislation. I regret, however, that, given the pressures on the parliamentary timetable, we cannot see any opportunity to legislate comprehensively during the lifetime of this Parliament.

We have also considered very carefully the proposal for a short Bill put to us by amenity bodies. We have concluded that this would not have sufficient advantages to be a priority candidate, in the light of the reservations expressed by other interested parties.

Land Planning

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use is made by his Department in developing land use planning policy of geographic information systems and digital terrain models.

Mr. Yeo: The Department of the Environment is involved in several applications of geographic information systems—GIS—and digital terrain models, mainly through its research programme. The inclusion of GIS along with other technologies is also being considered in the Department's information technology strategy.

The following GIS applications are of most relevance to the development of land use planning policy:

- In 1990 the Department undertook a survey of the stock of vacant land in urban areas of England. A GIS was used to select the sample for the survey.
- A research project is being undertaken to explore the potential uses of GIS in the analysis of countryside data.
- A further research project using the Department's land use change statistics applied GIS technology to analyse the data and to report on ways in which the data can be used to monitor planning policies.
- In the Countryside 1990 survey GIS is being used to link together broad-brush census information from satellite remote sensing and data from ground surveys to provide valuable ecological information about plant species and habitats.

Further information about some of these projects can be found in the article "Government in Action", written by my officials for inclusion in the 1991 yearbook of the Association for Geographic Information. A copy of the article has been placed in the Library.

Council House Sales, Bolton

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much extra money Bolton council would receive in capital receipts if its sales of council houses were now brought into line with the national average for sales since 1981.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 2,200 extra sales would be needed to catch up with the average for England, or 1,000 to come in line with the rest of the region. The receipts cannot be predicted reliably, but in recent months the average discounted selling price for council houses in Bolton has been about £11,000.

Homelessness

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent consideration he has given to the use of capital receipts by local authorities with a view to introducing more flexibility into the system in order to provide accommodation for homeless people.

Mr. Yeo: We have already introduced a number of relaxations to the rules on the use of capital receipts by local authorities, in particular to encourage provision of low-cost housing. We intend to keep these rules under review to ensure that they are fully achieving our policy aims.

Recycling Credits

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the report on recycling credits produced for his Department by Touche Ross management consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice).

EC Environment Council

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the outcome of the European Community Environment Council on 18 March; and what progress was made towards green labelling.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on 20 March, *Official Report*, column *129*. The discussion on eco-labelling revealed widespread general support for the Commission's proposal, but reservations from a number of member states, including the United Kingdom, about the structures and procedures for administering the scheme. We made clear our concern that the proposal should be agreed as soon as possible and look forward to significant progress at the next meeting of the Council.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on cost recovery charges for regulation of radioactive substances.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides for the introduction of charges to cover the costs incurred by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—HMIP—and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—MAFF—in regulating the holding of radioactive material, and the accumulation and disposal of radioactive waste, under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. With the agreement of the Treasury and the consent of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have now made a scheme of fees and charges, to take effect from 1 April 1991. I have placed a copy of the scheme in the Library.

Last July, the Government published a consultation document inviting comments on proposed charging arrangements, with fees and charges based on a division of premises into four "bands" designed to relate the level of charges to the amount of regulatory effort involved. The Department received 17 responses on the proposals, a list of which has been placed in the Library. Copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library.

Respondents generally endorsed the banded structure, and the scheme now made operates on this basis. Band 1

and 2 premises—BNFL Sellafield and the 30 or so nuclear power stations and other premises subject to licensing under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965—will be charged individually on the basis of the actual regulatory time and costs incurred. Charges for band 3 and 4 operators will be on the basis of a series of flat-rate fees, for consideration of applications for authorisation or registration, for the subsequent variation of an authorisation or registration, and annual subsistence charges for holding each authorisation or registration to cover the on-going costs of inspection, monitoring and oversight.

For band 3 operators—for example, major laboratories, major industrial users—the application and variation fees will be £800, and the annual subsistence charge £400. For band 4 operators—for example, smaller industrial users—the application and variation fees will be £300. The annual subsistence charge will be £75, but this will apply only to those holding larger closed sources. The majority of band 4 operators, holding smaller, closed sources, will not pay any annual charge, since these sources do not require routine inspection.

HMIP and MAFF will closely monitor their regulatory expenditure, and at the end of the financial year accounts and information on charge income and regulatory costs will be published.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest appropriate figures for *(a)* rate support grant per head, *(b)* business rate income per head, *(c)* total aggregate extended finance per head, *(d)* spending per head, *(e)* total aggregate spending and *(f)* population for each local authority in England.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 20 March 1991]:* I am arranging for the available information for 1991-92 to be placed in the Library of the House. Information on total aggregate finance and spending, which include specific grants, will not be available until authorities send in their detailed budget returns to the Department.

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the proportion of total local government spending accounted for by *(a)* education, *(b)* the police, *(c)* other services at present provided by county councils and *(d)* services provided by district councils.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Total Local Authority Net Current Expenditure

	Budget Estimates 1990-91
	Percentage
Education (all authorities)	46·3
Police (all authorities)	11·9
Other services (county councils)	13·4
All services (non-metropolitan district councils)	8·1

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what central grants were paid in 1990-91 and will be paid in 1991-92 *(a)* in total to each of the councils of Wandsworth, Westminster and Coventry and *(b)* per capita to Coventry.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* Amounts of revenue support grant, adjusted for safety net, special grants and the community charge grant are as follows:

	1990-91 £ Million	*1991-92 £ Million*
Wandsworth	153·1	192·8
Westminster	114·0	162·8
Coventry	84·0	111·8
£/Head of relevant population		
Coventry	385	503

In addition authorities receive transitional relief grant, community charge benefit grant and other specific grants. Information on the amounts payable for 1990-91 are as follows; information for 1991-92 will not be available until authorities send in their detailed budget returns to the Department.

	1990-91 £ Million
Wandsworth	11·1
Westminster	7·3
Coventry	32·4
£/Head of relevant population	
Coventry	148

Service Personnel

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will exclude service men and women from any new charges in relation to local government finance.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* It is our intention that the proposed new local tax will take account of the number of adults in a household and the value of the property. We will be consulting on the various options, including the coverage of the new tax.

United Nations Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the key points of his speech on environment and development given to the conference, "What On Earth Is To Be Done", on 19 March.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* Copies of my right hon. Friend's speech on this occasion have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he met the Secretary General of the 1992 United Nations special conference on environment and development during his visit to London on 19 March.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* No, but my right hon. Friend has arranged to see Mr. Strong in London next month.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, during his visit to the conference, "What On Earth Is To Be Done", he discussed with the youth representative speakers the matters they raised in regard to the responsibilities of the developed nations to assist in environmental protection of the poorer nations.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* My right hon. Friend listened with interest to a number of speakers on such subjects.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Charles Stewart Parnell (Statue)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will discuss with the appropriate authorities arrangements to move the statue of Charles Stewart Parnell to a more prominent location on the Committee Floor.

Mr. MacGregor: I have arranged for the hon. Member's proposal to be brought to the attention of the Advisory Committee on Works of Art in the House of Commons chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack).

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pools Scheme

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the pools scheme to benefit the arts and sports will operate on a national or a regional basis.

Mr. Mellor: It will be for the trustees to determine the detailed method of operation of the foundation for sport and the arts once it has been established. However, I understand from the proposers that it is the intention that the foundation will operate throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will determine, and distribute to the arts, the sums raised by the pools scheme announced in his Budget statement.

Mr. Mellor: It will be for the trustees to determine in detail how funds will be distributed once the foundation is established.

Interest (Taxation)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements the Inland Revenue is making to handle the increase in repayment claims which will result from changes in the taxation of bank and building society interest.

Mr. Maude: The Inland Revenue has undertaken an extensive publicity campaign to encourage all those who are eligible to register for payment of bank and building society interest without deduction of tax and so avoid the need to claim a repayment. Nevertheless, in the year 1992-93, the Inland Revenue needs to plan for a substantial increase in claims to repayment of tax deducted at source from interest and other investment income. The numbers are inevitably very uncertain, but could be well over 10 times the present annual total of around 800,000 claims.

It is likely that a high proportion of the claims will be made in the period from April to July each year. The Inland Revenue has had to look for a balance between the standards of service it can offer and the need to spread the work to some extent over the year, in order to keep costs down to a reasonable level. I have decided that the Inland Revenue should base its planning on the principle that the time taken to deal with any claim should not exceed three months. The Inland Revenue is setting up 24 new offices around the country to deal with the work. They will, of course, try to keep the time taken to process a claim to the minimum. But there may be occasions, especially in the period from April to July, when the volume of claims received makes it impossible to process them without delay.

Fixed-profit Car Scheme

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the tax-free mileage rates which will be used under the fixed-profit car scheme by the Inland Revenue for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The rates which will apply for 1991-92 are as follows:—

	Cars up to 1000cc	*Cars 1001—1500cc*	*Cars 1501—2000cc*	*Cars over 2000cc*
Up to 4,000 business miles	24·5p	30p	34p	45.0p
Over 4,000 business miles	11·0p	13p	16p	20·5p

An Inland Revenue press release is being issued today giving further details of the fixed-profit car scheme.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Climate Research

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the level of funding allocated in real terms over the next five years by the Natural Environment Research Council for climate research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The science budget has been announced for the period up to 1993-94. Within its allocations, the Natural Environment Research Council is currently planning to spend the following on climate research in real terms:

£ million at 1991-92 prices

1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
31·0	29·8	27·5

Playing Fields

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total number of secondary schools in England and Wales; how many of them intend to sell off playing fields over the next 18 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The latest available figures show that there were 4,208 maintained secondary schools in England and Wales in January 1990. Information on any plans to dispose of playing fields, either in part or whole, at these schools is not available to the Department. Minimum standards for playing fields at maintained schools are set

out in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. The disposal of surplus playing fields is a matter for the local education authorities concerned. We expect authorities to review the long-term need for such facilities before taking decisions on disposals.

Football Grounds

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about admission prices to football grounds for youngsters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have received two representations about admission prices to football grounds for youngsters attending away matches. The prices charged for admission to football matches are a matter for the football authorities and the individual clubs.

In-service Training

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what increase or decrease there has been or is proposed in in-service training by local education authorities in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what assessment he has made of the amount of in-service training *(a)* necessary and *(b)* being delivered relating to the national history curriculum.

Mr. Fallon: No figures are collected for the total volume of in-service training undertaken by local education authorities. It is for schools and local education authorities to decide how much training is required by their teachers in respect of any particular subject.

Single-sex Schools

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on single-sex educational provision in boroughs with multi-ethnic populations.

Mr. Fallon: There is no statutory duty on local education authorities to provide single-sex schools, and it is for them to decide how to respond to parental preferences for such schools. When considering new proposals from authorities either to establish or to close single-sex schools, my right hon. and learned Friend will consider each case on its merits, taking into account the extent of parental demand for this type of provision.

National Curriculum (History)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account he took in setting out the standards to be achieved in the national history curriculum, of the difficulty of working-class children in getting access to museums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The requirements of the national curriculum—including those of the order for history which my right hon. and learned Friend published yesterday—apply to all registered pupils of compulsory school age at maintained schools. It is for local education authorities, governing bodies and head teachers to exercise their functions under the Education Reform Act 1988 to make sure that those requirements are met, and they should ensure that all pupils are provided with all necessary learning opportunities. It is up to schools to decide how best to introduce their pupils to artefacts and historical sources. They may use their budgets to cover the cost of museum visits.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to assure himself that primary school teachers have sufficient expertise and training in history to teach the national history curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: It is for schools and local education authorities to assure themselves that their teachers are equipped to deliver the national curriculum. The Government are providing support through their programme of specific grants and the National Curriculum Council and School Examinations and Assessment Council are also producing and disseminating curriculum guidance and in-service training materials.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps have been taken to include the study of racial and sexual diversity in local, national and world links in the national history curriculum; and what specific steps have been taken to enable local education authorities and local museums to train teachers in this aspect of the curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the order for national curriculum history published yesterday. This should enable pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of British, European and world history. Local education authorities are encouraged to have due regard to multicultural and equal opportunities aspects in drawing up their training programmes in relation to national curriculum foundation subjects.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those further education colleges which he has visited between his appointment as Secretary of State and Thursday 21 March.

Mr. Eggar: As Minister responsible for further education, I have visited the following colleges:

Enfield college
South Tyneside college
Manchester college of arts and technology
Hammersmith and West London college
Thomas Danby college
Capel Manor college
Bournville college
Wirral metropolitan college
North Tyneside college
Milton Keynes college
Tower Hamlets college
Keighley college
Solihull college of technology
Suffolk college of higher and further education
Tresham college

Supply Teachers

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effectiveness for the administrative and resource arrangements allowing for the appointment of supply teachers to cover for teachers undertaking in-service training in connection with the national curriculum.

Mr. Fallon: It is for schools and local education authorities to manage and assess their arrangements for

in-service training. The senior chief inspector's report for 1989-90 notes the problems they are facing and the ways in which they are tackling them. The Department has commissioned studies by the National Foundation for Educational Research and Sussex university on best practice in this area, which have been made available to local education authorities and will be placed in the Library.

Polytechnics and Colleges (Land Disposal)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what conditions are attached to the disposal of Exchequer-funded land and buildings by polytechnics and colleges.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The conditions are the same as those which have applied to universities since 1985, and allow the retention of the proceeds of the sale of Exchequer-funded land and buildings, within specified limits, without reference to the annual appropriation procedures. These conditions are among those set out in financial memoranda between the Department and the Universities Funding Council and Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, copies of which I am placing in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Human Rights Abuse

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those occasions over the past year when Her Majesty's Government have made representations to Governments involved in the allied military coalition in the Gulf war concerning human rights abuses in their respective countries; and if he will indicate the criteria adopted by the Government in deciding why and when such representations are made.

The Prime Minister: No. Where allegations of abuse are well founded the Governments concerned are in no doubt of our concerns. Our criteria for representations are set out in the foreign policy document "Human Rights in Foreign Policy", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Gulf War

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish an inquiry into the economic effects of the Gulf war upon the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa and Bangladesh, the Republic of the Philippines and the Indian sub-continent.

The Prime Minister: The Government have studied the analysis produced by the International Monetary Fund, World bank and others on the economic effects of the Gulf war. We have supported the rapid steps taken by the international institutions to adapt their facilities to assist affected countries. Fortunately, the fall in oil prices at the outbreak of war, and the rapid conclusion of hostilities mean that the adverse effects will not be as severe as initially feared.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister what representations were received by Her Majesty's Government *(a)* from 2 August 1990 to 16 January 1991 and *(b)* from 17 January to 8 February concerning the negative ecological consequences of military action in the Gulf; from which organisations and individuals he received the representations; and what response he made to each.

The Prime Minister: Several thousand letters have been received on the subject of the illegal occupation of Kuwait by Iraq and its aftermath, including the ecological damage caused by deliberate release of oil into the Gulf and firing of the Kuwait oil fields.

Oil

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will propose an international scheme to make available oil at a substantially reduced price to the least developed states to assist them to restore the damage to their economies resulting from the Gulf war.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has provided through the European Community some £60 million to Jordan, Turkey and Egypt, the states whose economies were most directly affected by the Gulf conflict. Given the size of our military role in the Gulf conflict we consider that the United Kingdom should not make a further financial contribution; the burden should be shared by others. We have however encouraged the IMF and the World bank to make additional resources available on concessional terms to the poorest countries most affected. The IMF has made specific arrangements to compensate countries affected by higher oil prices. Where the international community is providing such assistance, it will enable those countries to maintain imports of oil at market prices. We believe that providing oil at reduced prices would lead to economic distortions and a wasteful use of energy.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Chicago Expo

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what fiscal incentives or grants are available to support British manufacturers wishing to exhibit at the Expo to be held on 8 April in Chicago.

Mr. Sainsbury: Normal terms of support provided for groups of British firms in overseas trade fairs were made available for the environmental technology Expo and the design engineering and plant engineering exhibitions which are part of the "national manufacturing week" in Chicago from 8 April 1991. The support takes the form of a subsidy of 50 per cent. of space and stand costs, together with assistance towards travel costs, for eligible companies.

A DTI-supported group will exhibit at the design engineering and plant engineering exhibitions, but there was insufficient demand from industry to justify support of a group at the environmental technology Expo.

Namibia

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the value of trade between Namibia and the United Kingdom in 1990-91, broken down by sector;

(2) what has been the total value of exports from the United Kingdom to Namibia since that country won its independence;

(3) what has been the total value of imports to the United Kingdom from Namibia since that country won its independence.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information on trade with Namibia is published monthly in "Business Monitor MM20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" which is in the Library of the House. Tables ii—imports—and v—exports —contain data for Namibia.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Ridley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure of the Department of Industry in 1979-80, and the total expenditure on the same votes in 1989-90, in real terms; and what was the one expressed as a percentage of the other.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information requested is shown in the following table, taking equivalent Department of Trade and Industry programmes in 1989-90. Running costs have been excluded because, owing to changes in departmental organisation, these cannot be presented on a comparable basis.

£ million

	1979-80	*1989-90 current prices*	*1989-90 constant prices*
Department of Industry expenditure (excluding running costs, nationalised industries and public corporations)	942	830	409
Nationalised industries	1,108	−13	−6
Public corporations	70	0	0
Total	2,120	817	403

The sum of £409 million is 43 per cent. of £942 million and £403 million is 19 per cent. of £2,120 million.

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to change the condition of United Kingdom arms control and licensing procedures as a result of the Single European Act.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* There are no plans to change the present controls on arms exports which reflect national and international security considerations. Such exports will continue to be subject to stringent export licensing procedures, consistent with our obligations under the treaty of Rome and the Single European Act. My officials are discussing with other Government Departments the possibilities for streamlining procedures relating to exports to our Community partners after 1992.

Israel

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Export Credits Guarantee Department will reduce the premium it is currently charging on credit for British firms wishing to place contracts in Israel for housing of Soviet immigrants; and what information he has on the equivalent premium charged by Britain's main trading competitors.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 11 March 1991]:* As part of its new portfolio management system, the Export Credits Guarantee Department is currently reviewing its premium rates for project business exports to a number of countries including Israel. The review should be completed shortly.

The ECGD assesses premium rates after taking into account the risks involved. The rates generally charged by other export credit agencies are taken into account, but it is necessary to draw a balance which recognises the costs to the taxpayer which can be involved in supporting project business.

Envirotech York Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution his Department made to the recent Envirotech York exhibition held at the university of York; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards regionally sponsored trade exhibitions for environmental technologies.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* My Department provided some financial support to the organisers of the Envirotech York exhibition through its regionally administered technology transfer scheme. In addition, the Minister for Industry officially opened the exhibition and my Department had a stand at it.

The thrust of DTI technology policy is generally national. DTI regional offices can provide support where the aim of a trade exhibition or other local activity is to improve the competitiveness of small and medium-sized companies in the region by promoting the wider and better use of modern technology, including environmental technologies.

Military Exhibitions

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all licensing regulations that apply to the import of military technology and equipment for the purpose of display at military equipment and armament shows held in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* All products requiring an individual import licence by virtue of the Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954 as amended are listed in the open general import licence of 4 December 1987 as amended, which is published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Military technology and equipment which do not incorporate items listed under entry No. 365 do not require a specific import licence and may be imported under the authority of the open general import licence.

CIVIL SERVICE

Recruitment

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement about changes in the arrangements for recruitment to the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Responsibility for recruitment to junior grades in the civil service was transferred from the civil service commissioners to Departments on 1 January 1983. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) the then Minister of State, announced on 13 April 1989 that it was proposed to extend further the area of recruitment which is the responsibility of Departments and agencies from 1 April 1991.

To give effect to the new recruitment arrangements the Civil Service Order in Council 1991 and a separate Diplomatic Service Order in Council 1991 were made at a meeting of the Privy Council held on 5 February 1991. The orders, copies of which have been placed in the Library, revoke and re-enact with substantial amendments the Civil Service Order in Council 1982.

From 1 April 1991, recruitment to all grades—except those at grade 7 level and above and their fast-stream feeder entries—will become the responsibility of Departments and agencies. This extends the area of recruitment for which Departments and agencies are responsible from the present 85 per cent. or so of all recruitment to over 95 per cent.

It is important that recruitment into the civil service should continue to be uninfluenced by patronage or partiality. Selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition has been the fundamental principle of civil service recruitment since the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms. This principle will be preserved both in selection undertaken by Departments and agencies—departmental recruitment—and in selection undertaken on the responsibility of the civil service commissioners—commissioners' recruitment. Certain exceptions to the general principle, which allow for flexibility in specific circumstances, are set out in schedules to the orders.

The changes are an essential part of the process of modernising the civil service and of giving managers more autonomy in the use of resources. They reflect the current change in the role of the central departments, with the emphasis switching from regulation and control to advice, audit and the provision of cost-effective services.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Gulf War

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any assessment has been made of the economic consequences of the Gulf war on Commonwealth countries in Africa, central and south-east Asia and the Caribbean; when he next expects to meet the Secretary General of the Commonwealth to discuss these matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have looked carefully into the economic consequences of the Gulf crisis on major recipients of British aid, taking into account the analytical work done by the IMF, World bank and others. The Secretary of State and I both meet the Secretary General of the Commonwealth from time to time to discuss matters of concern to Commonwealth members.

Africa (Famine Relief)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all allocations of famine relief for Africa made between September 1984 and September 1985, in current and constant 1991 prices, and since September 1990 to date.

Mrs. Chalker: Allocations of British emergency aid to Ethiopia between September 1984 and September 1985 are listed on pages 66 and 67 of the Foreign Affairs Committee's first report in the 1987-88 Session on "Famine in the Horn of Africa".

Allocations of famine relief made to African countries in 1990 were given in my reply to the hon. Member's question of 29 January at columns *462-63*. In 1991 the following commitments have been made:

United Kingdom Food Aid Committed in 1991

	tonnes	*Estimated cost £ million*
Ethiopia	42,800	8·036
Malawi	6,000	1·2
Mozambique	10,000	2·0
Sudan	20,000	4·0

Other United Kingdom Emergency Relief Committed in 1991

		£ million
January	Ethiopia	2·000
February	Malawi	0·090
February	Liberia	0·017
February	Chad	0·035
February	Burkina Faso	0·010
February	Sudan	0·002
February	Ethiopia	0·250
March	Sudan	0·400
March	Liberia	0·038
March	Tanzania	0·040
March	Sudan	0·125
March	Ethiopia	0·430
March	Kenya	0·197

The remaining information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Environmental Issues

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Government's response to the Environment Select Committee's report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Government's response is being published today and a copy has been placed in the Library. We are committed to safeguarding Northern Ireland's rich natural and man-made environment and we welcome the report as a constructive and opportune contribution towards achieving this end.

The Government recognise the need to accelerate action to conserve and enhance the environment in Northern Ireland and are making available substantially increased resources to deal with the backlog of environmental legislation and to protect valuable habitats.

Much has already been done. Some 20 per cent. of Northern Ireland currently lies within designated areas of

outstanding natural beauty. There are seven country parks, 44 national nature reserves and 26 areas of special scientific interest. The Giant's Causeway is a world heritage site and Lough Neagh and Lough Beg have together been designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar convention. Consultations are under way which will lead to the declaration of the internationally important Strangford Lough as a marine nature reserve. Some 167 historic monuments are in state care and almost 1,000 monuments have been scheduled for protection; 26 conservation areas have been designated and 7,800 buildings of architectural and historic importance listed.

Progress has also been made in dealing with pollution. Significant advances have been made in reducing smoke and SO_2 levels since the clean air legislation was introduced in 1964. Some 95 per cent. of rivers are classified as good or fair under the national river classification scheme. The large number of prosecutions for water pollution offences in Northern Ireland is evidence of the Government's determination to protect this asset.

The Government are reviewing their rural planning policy. The review will take account of the duty to preserve, on the one hand the natural beauty of the countryside and on the other the needs of a strong rural society.

The Government fully recognise the need to build on the progress which has already been made. They are committed to increasing the protection of habitats, for example, by accelerating the programme for the survey and declaration of areas of special scientific interest and to the preservation of scientific beauty by reviewing of areas of outstanding natural beauty. Secondly, we have undertaken to conserve the man-made heritage by completing the survey of all historic monuments by 1995 and the listing of all pre-1960 buildings of architectural and historic interest by 1994. Thirdly, we will continue to improve pollution control by greatly extending the water quality monitoring of all main rivers and estuaries and by enhancing sewage treatment. The Government will encourage the public to be more aware of Northern Ireland's heritage and emphasise the fact that the individual has a significant contribution to make to a good environment.

The Government have already taken action, or are planning, to meet all but one of the Committee's recommendations. However, we have concluded that we would not be justified in accepting the recommendation that an independent environmental agency should be established.

Firstly, the creation of an independent agency would conflict with the recommendations in the Balfour report. Secondly, decisions already taken, or planned, will resolve the problems which underlie the Committee's recommendation. The establishment of a Government-owned company to take over responsibility for water and sewerage services will separate these services from the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland. The Department will retain the regulatory functions. This division of responsibility will eliminate the "poacher-gamekeeper" factor in relation to water pollution control.

In addition, resources are being increased; the status of conservation and other environmental policies has been enhanced by the creation of a directorate whose head is a member of the DOE(NI) top management team; and the Government are committed to assuring the public that environmental factors will be a vital part of decision making.

In the recent White Paper "This Common Inheritance", the Government confirmed their undertaking to protect Northern Ireland's environment and to bequeath to future generations an unspoiled countryside with clean air and unpolluted rivers and seas. In responding to the Committee's report, we reaffirm our commitment to implement positive environmental policies which will safeguard the natural and man-made heritage in Northern Ireland.

HEALTH

Grandparents

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department is issuing to local authorities in connection with the Children Act 1989; and whether this guidance will include any details on grandparents' access to their grandchildren.

Mr. Dorrell: A number of documents have already been issued to local authorities including "An Introduction to the Children Act", a training curriculum produced by the London boroughs training committee, and "The Care of Children—Principles and Practice in Regulations and Guidance", copies of which are available in the Library.

Earlier this month over 20,000 copies of the first volume of guidance and regulations, on court orders, were distributed free of charge. Some 16,000 free copies were sent to directors of social services, and copies were also sent to chief education officers and chief executives. Volume 2 "Family Support, Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children" was launched last week and will be distributed shortly; copies of both volumes are available in the Library. Volume 3 on family placements is being prepared and will be launched next month, and further volumes will follow, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Volume 1 includes guidance on the new section 8 contact orders, which are available in private law proceedings and for which grandparents may apply provided that they have first obtained leave of court to do so. This volume also contains guidance on the new provisions as to contact with children who are the subject of a care order.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes to grandparents' access to their grandchildren will arise from the implementation of the Children Act 1989 on 14 October.

Mr. Dorrell: The Children Act 1989 makes new provisions regarding contact with children who are the subject of a care order. The Act provides that any person who has obtained the leave of the court to do so may apply for an order determining the contact which is to be allowed between the child and that person.

It is anticipated that this provision will enable people with whom the child has previously had a close relationship but who are not automatically entitled to reasonable contact with the child—such as, in many cases, grandparents—to keep in touch with that child while he is in the care of the local authority. If the grandparent was the beneficiary of a residence order made under section 8

of the Act immediately prior to the care order being made, he will be one of those automatically entitled to reasonable contact.

Where a child is being looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis, contact is a matter for agreement between parents, foster parents and the authority. The authority will have a duty to promote reasonable contact between the child and his relatives—including a grandparent—where this is consistent with the child's welfare.

In addition, the Act makes changes to the private law. It introduces a range of orders under section 8 which will be available to the court in private law proceedings. One of these, the contact order, requires the person with whom a child is living to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, and for that person and the child to have contact with each other. Anyone who has the leave of the court to do so may apply for a contact order.

Where grandparents have maintained a close relationship with the child, obtaining the permission of the court is unlikely to be much more than a formality.

For a limited number of cases, grandparents still have the right to apply for a section 8 contact order without first obtaining the court's leave. Broadly, these are where the child has lived with the grandparents for three years or more, or the grandparent has the consent of the person in whose favour there is a residence order in force—or the local authority where the child is in care—or, in any other case, the consent of those having parental responsibility for the child.

Health Authorities (Administration)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new administrative posts have been created by English health authorities since 1 January 1990; what the reason for these new posts are; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Chiropody

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any new proposals for the recognition of the chiropody profession based on a recognised course of qualification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Chiropody courses that lead to state registration are those recognised and approved by the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine. There are no plans to change that arrangement.

Child Employment

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking in order to assess the effectiveness of regulations governing child employment; and if he has any plans to amend existing legislation.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to assess the effectiveness of regulations governing child employment; and if he has any plans to seek to amend existing legislation.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the report of the national child employment study on "Children at Work in the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on 25 March.

Patents (Chemical Substances)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give the remaining patent life for each new chemical entity and new active substance licensed and marketed in each of the years 1987, 1988 and 1989-90, respectively;

(2) how many products licensed in each of the years 1987, 1988 and 1989-90 had no effective patent life remaining at the point of marketing.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not our practice to give information on the commercial position of the pharmaceutical companies covered by the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Health Service, Kuwait

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what help he is giving to the Kuwaiti Minister of Public Health to rebuild their health service.

Mr. Dorrell: I wrote to Dr. al Fouzan, Kuwait's Minister of Public Health, soon after the liberation of Kuwait offering our full support for the provision of emergency health services. I also commended to him, for the longer term, the services of a British health care-industry consortium, led by John Laing International. Through links with the Association of British Healthcare Industries, the consortium has access to providers of a wide range of British goods and services, including NHS expertise through NHS Overseas Enterprises. The consortium is now actively collaborating with the Kuwaiti Health Ministry to assess that country's needs.

Hospitals

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has given to an application from the North Western regional health authority for a grant towards the cost of the approved move of the department of psychiatry for the deaf from Whittingham hospital, Preston, to Manchester; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: On the advice of the supra-regional services advisory group, we are making available in 1991-92 bridging finance to assist with the proposed move of the department of psychiatry for the deaf from Whittingham hospital to Prestwich. The loan would be repayable on the sale of property or land on the Whittingham site.

The initial response of North Western regional health authority has been to decline the offer of bridging finance. The timing and funding of the relocation of the service is ultimately a matter for the health authority.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on the future of the Vale of Catmose hospital, Oakham, following the visit last summer by the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), Under-Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Dorrell: Leicestershire health authority approved the closure of Catmose Vale hospital on 8 February 1989.

The closure of Catmose Vale is part of the district's overall strategy for hospital services. A full public consultation exercise was carried out and the Leicestershire community health council agreed the closure. I understand the hospital will not close until facilities to reprovide services are complete at Rutland memorial hospital.

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many gynaecology beds will be available for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* day care patients in Sharoe Green hospital on (i) 1 April 1991, (ii) 31 December 1991 and (iii) 1 April 1992; what percentage these are of beds available as at 1 April 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. W. I. Woolley, the chairman of Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley health authority, for details.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of his Ministers has been given responsibility for energy use by his Department; and what is his or her brief regarding energy efficiency.

Mr. Jack: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Lord Henley, has been given responsibility for energy use. His brief is to maximise energy efficiency in the Department's buildings and to take opportunities to assist in promoting energy efficiency awareness among our staff and clients.

I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 28 January 1991 at column *434*.

Child Benefit

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, on the same basis as his reply to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), 7 June 1988, *Official Report*, columns *521-22*, the total amount of child benefit, together with the number of families and children in respect of which it is paid, and the percentage which each figure represents for the income bands *(a)* under £5,000, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* £20,000 to £25,000, *(f)* £25,000 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,000 to £100,000 and *(h)* £100,000 and over.

Mr. Jack: Information about incomes of families receiving child benefit is not routinely collected. The following estimates of the gross incomes of recipient families in 1991-92 are therefore made on the basis of sample survey data which are subject to normal sampling and response variation.

Band of gross income	*Families receiving child benefit*		*Number of children*		*Child benefit expenditure*	
	000s	*per cent.*	*000s*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*
Under £5,000	220	(3·2)	260	(2·1)	110	(2·2)
£5,000 to £10,000	1,410	(20·7)	2,610	(21·2)	1,060	(21·2)
£10,000 to £15,000	1,080	(15·8)	2,070	(16·8)	840	(16·8)
£15,000 to £20,000	1,270	(18·6)	2,330	(18·9)	950	(18·9)
£20,000 to £25,000	990	(14·5)	1,820	(14·8)	740	(14·7)
£25,000 to £50,000	1,550	(22·7)	2,700	(21·9)	1,100	(22·0)
Above £50,000	300	(4·4)	520	(4·3)	210	(4·3)
	6,810	(100·0)	12,310	(100·0)	5,010	(100·0)

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the 1986, 1987, 1988 family expenditure survey, supplemented by the survey of personal incomes, and updated to 1991-92 levels of earnings and benefit rates excluding proposed changes to child benefit announced in the Budget.
2. Income is measured on a gross basis and is the family's total income from all sources.
3. Estimates take no account of any failure to claim income-related benefits.
4. No detailed breakdown is possible for an income band above £50,000 because of sample sizes.
5. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000.
6. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Benefit Arrears

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give *(a)* for each social security office within Strathclyde region, the number of awards of supplementary benefit since April 1987, where regulation 72 of the adjudication regulations has operated to make the arrears payable to the claimant and *(b)* the number of these cases involving payment of arrears prior to November 1980.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Part-time Students

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy on paying benefit to part-time students who have courses to take, free of charge, but can obtain no grant or charitable funding.

Miss Widdecombe: Unemployed part-time students can receive income support provided they are prepared to terminate the course if a job vacancy arises, and they meet the basic conditions of entitlement to benefit. That is, for a fit person of working age, to be available for and actively seeking employment.

Local Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy toward the provision of answerphones for local offices for use after hours; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Local offices can, at their discretion, use answerphones after hours to receive and impart information. Currently just under half do so.

State Pensions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in which areas his Department has employed the services of market researchers to canvass pensioners over their preferred method for receiving payment of their state pension;

(2) if his Department employs the services of market researchers to canvass pensioners over their preferred method for receiving payment of their state pensions in *(a)* urban areas and *(b)* rural areas.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has recently employed market researchers to conduct a survey of preferred methods for receiving payment of state benefits. It was conducted amongst a nationally representative sample of pensioners, people coming up to retirement and people receiving child benefit.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the payment of state pensions through post offices and sub-post offices.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received no recent representations.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy on payment methods of state pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's policy is to provide state retirement pensioners with the option of payment either by order book encashable at a post office or by automated credit transfer direct to a bank or building society account.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance his Department has issued to pensioners who receive a state pension about methods of receiving that benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about different methods of receiving retirement pension is contained in the pension claim form. In addition, in 1988, personal letters were sent to state retirement pensioners reminding them of the facility to receive their pension by automated credit transfer to a bank or building society account.

Benefit Appeals, Scotland

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of appeals heard and decided by tribunals concerning *(a)* income support, *(b)* mobility allowance, *(c)* attendance allowance, *(d)* injury and disablement benefit, *(e)* invalidity benefit and *(f)* non-income-related benefits in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland in the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and in the current year.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available statistics relating to social security appeal tribunals are for the quarter ending 31 March 1990. National administrative statistics for appeal tribunals are not available for areas smaller than a social security region. The relevant information for Scotland is in the table.

Total number of social security appeals heard and decided: Scotland

	Year ending 31 December 1988	*Year ending 31 December 1989*	*Quarter ending 31 March 1990*
Income Support	733	3,564	841
Mobility Allowance	182	209	36
Attendance Allowance	13	24	3
Disablement Benefit	263	278	54
Invalidity Benefit	526	674	119
Child Benefit	216	277	65
Invalid Care Allowance	124	92	17
Maternity Allowance	2	3	1
Retirement Pension	63	44	5
Severe Disablement Allowance	25	18	3
Unemployment Benefit	3,510	2,813	551
Widows Benefit	46	33	15

Social Fund

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many crisis loans were claimed and awarded by the Coventry East and West Department of Social Security offices last year.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is available in the Library.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the last year who have claimed a crisis loan from the social fund at the Coventry East office of the Department of Social Security as the only means by which serious damage or serious risk to their health or safety may be prevented have been refused a loan because, in the opinion of the social fund officer, they could not afford to repay it; what is the number for the Coventry West office; and what percentage of all applications for crisis loans are refused for this reason at each office.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the number of crisis loan applications received together with the number of crisis loan refusals because of perceived inability to repay for the period 1 April 1990 to the end of February 1991.

	Applications received April 1990 to February 1991	*Number of refusals due to perceived inability to repay*	*Percentage of refusals due to perceived inability to repay*
Coventry East	3,633	83	2·29
Coventry West	1,430	4	0·28

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in the last year who have attempted to claim a crisis loan from the social fund at the Coventry East Department of Social Security office as the only means by which serious damage or serious risk to their health or safety may be prevented have not been assessed on the day they have claimed but have been told to return the following day; and what are the figures for the Coventry West office;

(2) how many people in the last year have been awarded a crisis loan from the social fund at the Department of Social Security Coventry East office as the only means by

which serious risk to their health or safety may be prevented and have been awarded a loan but told it would be posted to them instead of being paid to them on the day they were awarded it; and what are the figures for the Coventry West office.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Disabled Drivers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to the 1991 Budget statement, whether he will make a statement about the measures designed to help disabled drivers.

Mr. Scott: There are two measures arising from the Chancellor's Budget statement which will be of particular help to disabled drivers. The first is an extension in relief from car tax to cover vehicles leased to disabled drivers who are unable to complete the three-year leasing agreement. The second is to increase to £40 the annual petrol tax allowance paid to those disabled drivers who still have a vehicle provided through the invalid vehicle scheme. This represents a 300 per cent. increase in the existing allowance. I am especially pleased to welcome these modest, but worthwhile concessions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Support

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total of moneys received from the European Economic Community, in connection with agricultural support, subsidies or intervention payments of any kind, in each year since accession; and what has been the net cost of agricultural support, both national and Community, after allowing for the moneys received from the European Economic Community.

Mr. Curry: The total of European Community receipts in relation to agriculture, and total United Kingdom expenditure on agricultural grants and subsidies, for the period requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Total receipts from the EC in relation to agriculture*	*Total Exchequer expenditure on agricultural grants and subsidies in the United Kingdom (EC and national) (£ million)*
1973-74	80	390
1974-75	170	490
1975-76	260	510
1976-77	180	380
1977-78	190	460
1978-79	330	540
1979-80	410	680
1980-81	610	1,010
1981-82	740	970
1982-83	810	1,430
1983-84	1,200	1,730
1984-85	1,200	1,710
1985-86	1,280	2,170
1986-87	1,480	1,450
1987-88	1,130	1,630
1988-89	1,600	1,380
1989-90	1,230	1,260
1990-91	1,620	1,960

It would be misleading to net these receipts off the expenditure because the United Kingdom is a large net contributor to the Community budget and the receipts are in effect fully funded by the Exchequer.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was *(a)* the overall cost and *(b)* the net cost to the Exchequer of support to United Kingdom agriculture in each year from 1960 to 1990 in actual and real terms; and if he will show each set of figures as a percentage of the gross domestic product.

Mr. Curry: The gross cost to the Exchequer of all agricultural support for each year from 1960-61 to 1989-90 is given in the table. The cost is also shown in real terms. It would be misleading to show the cost net of EC receipts because the United Kingdom is a large net contributor to the Community budget and the receipts are in effect fully funded by the Exchequer. The table also shows the cost of support as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Financial year	*Expenditure on agriculture support*		*Gross domestic product at current market prices (1989-90) (c) £m*	*(a) As a percentage of (c)*
	Actual (a) £m	*Real terms (b) £m*		
1960-61	263	27	26,277	1·000
1961-62	343	36	27,686	1·240
1962-63	310	34	29,067	1·070
1963-64	294	33	31,358	·940
1964-65	264	31	34,200	·770
1965-66	237	29	36,605	·650
1966-67	229	29	38,852	·590
1967-68	262	35	41,196	·640
1968-69	269	37	44,647	·600
1969-70	281	41	47,962	·590
1970-71	273	43	53,180	·510
1971-72	323	56	59,276	·540
1972-73	267	50	67,589	·400
1973-74	392	78	75,006	·520
1974-75	495	118	89,376	·550
1975-76	512	153	111,210	·460
1976-77	378	128	130,070	·290
1977-78	460	177	151,431	·300
1978-79	538	229	173,762	·310
1979-80	677	338	208,644	·320
1980-81	1,012	597	237,798	·430

Financial year	Expenditure on agriculture support		Gross domestic product at current market prices (1989-90) (c) £m	(a) As a percentage of (c)
	Actual (a) £m	Real terms (b) £m		
1981-82	972	629	260,950	·370
1982-83	1,433	993	285,691	·500
1983-84	1,729	1,253	309,788	·560
1984-85	1,712	1,304	331,873	·520
1985-86	2,165	1,741	362,876	·600
1986-87	1,449	1,204	390,732	·370
1987-88	1,630	1,428	431,984	·380
1988-89	1,380	1,299	480,635	·290
1989-90	1,258	1,258	518,671	·240

Sources: (a) and (b) 1960-61 to 1985-86 Annual Reviews of White Papers.
1986-87 to 1989-90 Agriculture in the United Kingdom.
(c) 1960-61 to 1989-90 CSO Economic Trends 1989-90.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing *(a)* the amount spent on agricultural support in the United Kingdom under the common agricultural policy and by national grants and subsidies and *(b)* the expenditure on agricultural support as a percentage of the gross domestic product, for the years 1960-61, 1970-71 and each year from 1980-81 to 1990-91.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Amount spent on agricultural support in the United Kingdom under the CAP and by national grants and subsidies[1]	Gross domestic product[2]	Expenditure on agricultural support as a percentage of the gross domestic product
1960-61	260	26,277	0·99
1970-71	270	53,180	0·51
1980-81	1,010	237,798	0·43
1981-82	970	260,950	0·37
1982-83	1,430	285,691	0·50
1983-84	1,730	309,788	0·56
1984-85	1,710	331,873	0·51
1985-86	2,170	362,876	0·60
1986-87	1,450	390,732	0·37
1987-88	1,630	431,984	0·38
1988-89	1,380	480,635	0·29
1989-90	1,260	518,671	0·24
1990-91 Forecast	1,960	547,000	0·36

Sources:
[1]1960-61 to 1986-87: Annual Review White Papers.
1987-88 to 1990-91: Agriculture In The UK.
[2]1960-61 to 1984-85: C.S.O. Economic Trends Annual Supplement 1991 Edition.
1985-86 to 1989-90: C.S.O. Press Notice—CSO (91) 37—15 March 1991.
1990-91: Financial Statement of the Budget Report 1991.

Cereal Substitutes

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the principal cereal substitutes with the prices paid by the compounders imported into *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Economic Community.

Mr. Curry: Information on the average unit values of imports of the principal cereal substitutes during the period January to October 1990 is shown in the table. Comparisons may be affected by many factors including variations in date of importation, transport and handling costs, origin and specification of the product.

Average unit values[1] of principal cereal substitutes imported during January to October 1990 into:

£ per tonne

	European Community	United Kingdom		
	From third countries	From rest of EC	From third countries	All sources
Manioc	88·3	neg	neg	neg
Maize Gluten Feed	87·1	93·9	89·5	90·2
Maize Germ Cake	89·5	neg	neg	neg
Citrus Pulp	88·9	98·8	102·0	101·5
Other Fruit Waste	75·1	neg	neg	neg
Beet Pulp	88·0	90·5	95·3	93·5
Sweet Potatoes	104·7	neg	neg	neg
Brans	64·5	94·1	86·0	93·4

	European Community	United Kingdom		
	From third countries	From rest of EC	From third countries	All sources
Brewers/distillers waste	94·9	77·4	92·2	88·6
Other starch residues	95·3	neg	neg	neg

Source: based on Eurostat data.
Notes:
neg = negligible imports recorded.
[1]average unit value is the aggregate value of imports (cif) *divided* by quantity of imports. Import levies and duties (applicable only to brans and manioc) are not included in the valuations of imports direct from third countries but may be reflected in valuation of re-exports and transhipments.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further consideration he has given to the issue of sheep scab policy and public safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: A review of sheep scab policy is taking place and an announcement will be made when this is completed.

All sheep dip products are licensed under the Medicines Act 1968 and are currently subject to a review to ensure the most up-to-date standards on safety—including safety to the environment. Any products which fail to meet these standards will be withdrawn from the market. The review will be completed by the end of the year.

Cereals

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the degree of self-sufficiency in the United Kingdom, and European Economic Community, United States, Canada and the Cairns group countries of *(a)* wheat, *(b)* all cereals, *(c)* all cereals and cereal substitutes for the years 1979, 1985 and the latest year available.

Mr. Curry: Estimates of self-sufficiency in wheat and in cereals are shown in the table for the countries specified and a selection of Cairns group members. Comprehensive information on cereals substitutes is not readily available. Broad estimates for the European Community suggest a self-sufficiency in cereals and substitutes combined of about 103 per cent. in 1985-86 and 105 per cent. in 1989-90: corresponding estimates for the United Kingdom are 109 and 110 per cent. respectively and around 80 per cent. in 1979-80.

Estimated degree of self sufficiency[1] per cent.

	1979-80		1985-86		1989-90	
	Wheat	[2]Cereals	Wheat	[2]Cereals	Wheat	[2]Cereals
United Kingdom[3]	76·0	79·6	105·5	113·6	122·5	113·6
European Community (EC12)[4]	112·9	92·8	122·5	114·2	133·3	119·3
United States[4]	272·8	162·5	231·2	171·4	205·2	138·1
Canada[4]	312·7	152·5	433·9	201·7	450·0	193·1
Selected Cairns Group countries:						
Argentina[4]	202·5	231·1	189·1	209·8	232·5	188·8
Australia[4]	476·5	366·1	578·5	398·4	454·8	265·4
New Zealand[5]	87·8	99·8	80·8	116·8	50·0	100·0

[1] Self sufficiency is defined here as quantity produced divided by quantity consumed: this may differ from definition used nationally.
[2] Wheat and coarse grain excluding rice.
[3] Source: Home-Grown Cereals Authority, 'Cereal Statistics'. 1983, 1988 and 1990 editions.
[4] Source for wheat and coarse grains data: FAO 'Food Outlook', February 1991; FAO 'Food Outlook' Statistical Supplement 1989.
[5] Source is OECD: 1979-80 from 'National Policies and Agricultural Trade, Country Study: New Zealand'—cereals are wheat and barley only; 1985-86 and 1989-90 from 1988 and 1990 editions respectively of OECD 'Agricultural Policies, Markets and Trade, Monitoring and Outlook Report'.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the numbers of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom for each month since 1986 to the latest available date.

Mr. Gummer: The number of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom listed by month of onset of clinical signs is as follows:

Month	Number
July 1986	1
August 1986	1
September 1986	3
October 1986	3
November 1986	3
December 1986	1
January 1987	5
February 1987	5
March 1987	8
April 1987	15
May 1987	13
June 1987	29
July 1987	41
August 1987	35
September 1987	76
October 1987	71
November 1987	66
December 1987	98
January 1988	132
February 1988	94
March 1988	107
April 1988	142
May 1988	165
June 1988	253
July 1988	261
August 1988	280

Month	Number
September 1988	357
October 1988	372
November 1988	422
December 1988	495
January 1989	524
February 1989	542
March 1989	530
April 1989	505
May 1989	516
June 1989	517
July 1989	588
August 1989	711
September 1989	696
October 1989	752
November 1989	795
December 1989	972
January 1990	1,182
February 1990	1,253
March 1990	1,135
April 1990	1,006
May 1990	1,000
June 1990	970
July 1990	1,071
August 1990	1,158
September 1990	1,199

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for each year since 1987, how many BSE cows have been identified *(a)* on the farm, *(b)* at the livestock market, *(c)* at the slaughterhouse and *(d)* at other locations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: For 1987 the information is not available. For 1988 onwards the information for Great Britain is as follows:

Year	Farm	Market	Slaughter-house	Other locations
1988	2,140	16	27	2
1989	7,004	55	73	4
1990	13,767	74	97	4

EC Food Surpluses

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assist with the distribution of surplus EC food by meeting the costs of distribution by charitable organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Designated organisations will be entitled to reimbursement of the costs of each of the two stages of transport from store to processor and from processor to distribution point, up to certain maximum levels. Organisations participating in the distribution will also be able to reclaim justifiable and directly related administrative costs.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated value of EC surplus food to be distributed in the United Kingdom, in 1991; how this total will be divided between the regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom has been allocated some £17·62 million worth of butter and beef for distribution during 1991. The geographical spread of this distribution will depend solely on the voluntary participation of charitable and other non-profit-making organisations. Applications for designation are currently being considered and I will make a statement as soon as a decision has been made.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to enable homeless and destitute people to receive a share of the surplus EC food to be distributed in the near future where no charitable organisation is available to organise the distribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The distribution of produce to all eligible groups depends entirely on the voluntary participation of suitable organisations and I have no plans to change this arrangement.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Warren: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many acres of farm land have been included in the set-aside scheme; what is the total sum paid to farmers to date; and what are the terms and conditions required of recipients to keep the said land in a reasonable condition.

Mr. Curry: Around 265,000 acres has been entered into the set-aside scheme in England in the first three years. Payments are made one year in arrears. A total of £8 million was paid in respect of the first scheme year and a further £17·5 million has been allocated in respect of the second.

Details of the management obligations placed upon participants are included in the scheme literature, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Tobacco

Sir David Price: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government are taking to persuade the Council of Ministers of the European Community to reduce the support to tobacco growing within the Community.

Mr. Curry: The Government have consistently campaigned for reductions in EC support levels for tobacco, and particularly for higher tar varieties. In the current annual price-fixing negotiations, the biggest price cuts proposed by the Commission are for tobacco. The proposals would cut prices by an average of 10 per cent. with a range of 4 to 17 per cent. depending on variety, with the biggest cuts falling on higher tar varieties. The Government fully support these proposals.

The EC tobacco regime is to be completely reviewed later this year. The Government's object will be to secure the most radical reform negotiable.

Veterinary Investigation Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of man hours spent on *(a)* salmonella and *(b)* BSE at each of the veterinary investigation centres in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The table lists the number of man hours of veterinary and scientific staff time in each of the veterinary investigation centres in England and Wales for the period 1 April to 31 December 1990.

VI centre	Salmonella man hours	BSE man hours
Aberystwyth	1,006	579
Bangor	1,259	641
Bristol	3,379	708

VI centre	Salmonella man hours	BSE man hours
Cambridge	3,056	2,764
Carmarthen	953	1,297
Lincoln	2,917	630
Newcastle	1,686	1,822
Norwich	5,936	592
Penrith	614	751
Preston	4,632	1,504
Reading	1,952	1,440
Shrewsbury	2,287	2,368
Starcross	1,779	1,333
Sutton Bonington	2,950	2,354
Truro	724	1,707
Thirsk	2,315	1,773
Worcester	2 264	2,528
Winchester	1,164	555
Wye	1,875	1,367

It should be noted that since the veterinary investigation service is managed and operated on a national basis, certain activities within both the salmonella and BSE columns do not reflect activity arising locally —for example, all examinations of processed animal protein for salmonella under the relevant orders are rationalised in one centre and the final histopathological diagnosis of BSE is spread over a number of centres to ensure as rapid a diagnosis as possible.

It should also be noted that the veterinary field service and not the veterinary investigation service is responsible for the field activities in relation to BSE and for certain field activities in relation to salmonella under the Zoonoses Order, the Poultry Laying Flocks and the Poultry Breeding Flocks and Hatcheries Order and the Processed Animal Protein Orders.

Veterinary Laboratory, Lincoln

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed closure of the veterinary laboratory at Lincoln on the efficiency of veterinary inspection in that area.

Mr. Maclean: In carrying out the review of the veterinary investigation service the review team carried out a full assessment of the impact of the closure of the Lincoln veterinary investigation centre on not only the Department's responsibilities in relation to statutory obligations, disease surveillance, public health and food safety matters, but on the maintenance of an effective and viable service to the local livestock industry. Final decisions were taken only after a very detailed consideration of the facts.

Responsibility for the work carried out at Lincoln is being transferred to the Sutton Bonington centre where additional accommodation, veterinary and scientific staff and increased investment in new technology are being provided. The quality control unit which operates on a national basis and is currently located at Lincoln is being relocated in new purpose-built accommodation at another centre.

As I indicated in my announcement of the outcome of the review, I am confident that the implementation of the recommendations of the review team will result in significant improvements in the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the service provided. The veterinary investigation service will be well equipped not only to meet our national needs over the years ahead but to continue to provide an efficient service to Lincolnshire.

EC Slaughterhouse Regulations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about derogations to EC slaughterhouse regulations in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: At present, all slaughterhouses wishing to export to other member states must comply in full with EC slaughterhouse regulations; there are no derogations.

However, the European Commission's single market proposals covering this sector include provision for (i) temporary derogations for businesses which will be unable to comply with the proposed rules before the end of 1992; and (ii) permanent derogations from the structural rules for small businesses. The precise nature and scope of these derogations remain to be resolved in the course of negotiations in Brussels.

The Government fully support the proposal to introduce a single hygiene standard in the meat sector and consider that derogations should be available only where there is a genuine need for them. They should not be used as a means of delaying achievement of the single standard.

Seafish Committees

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to strengthen the powers of seafish committees to enable them to develop byelaws regulating the use of monofilament fixed gill nets; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Under the terms of the Sea Fisheries Regulations Act 1966, sea fisheries committees already have powers to regulate netting within their areas of jurisdiction.

Fishing Industry

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether Fisheries Ministers have now completed their consultations with the United Kingdom fishing industry on the introduction of a 90 mm square mesh panel and related measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As foreshadowed in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 14 January, Fisheries Ministers have now consulted the fishing industry about the unilateral introduction for United Kingdom fishing vessels of 90 mm square mesh panels in the North sea and west of Scotland demersal fisheries. The industry as a whole has acknowledged the need for improved conservation measures, but has drawn attention to various problems which the proposed measure would cause. While appreciating these difficulties, we have decided that, in the long-term interests of the industry itself, we do need to introduce the new requirement from 1 July. From this date, with the exception of beam trawlers, United Kingdom vessels fishing in the North sea and the west of Scotland north of 56 deg north and using nets of between 90 mm and 100 mm mesh size inclusive will be required to use a 90 mm square mesh panel of a specified size in either the cod end or extension piece. The

cod end will also have to meet certain requirements on construction; and the use of topside chafers and lifting bags will be prohibited. However, taking account of the points which the industry has raised the specific requirement to use a 90 mm square mesh panel will, initially at least, not apply to vessels whose maximum engine power does not exceed 298 kW—400 horse power: this derogation will not be available to vessels working as pairs if their combined engine power exceeds 298 kW. By 31 March next year we will review the arrangements in the light of experience and any developments, for example, in relation to EC technical conservation measures.

We also sought industry views on the desirability of including square mesh panels in nephrops nets in order to reduce whitefish by catches. In the light of industry comments, we will introduce from 1 July a requirement that in areas IV and VI nets with a mesh size from 70mm to under 90mm, or in the case of area VI south of 56 deg north under 80mm, should include 80mm square mesh panels except in the case of beam trawlers. In the Irish sea, area VIIa, where different mesh size regulations apply, all nets of between 70mm and 85mm inclusive, including both nephrops and whitefish nets, should include a square mesh panel of 75mm, again with the exception of beam trawlers.

Given the United Kingdom's major share of the North sea and west of Scotland cod and haddock stocks and the importance to our fleet of the Irish sea fisheries, we have a clear interest to improve the conservation of these stocks. I believe that these unilateral measures will not only make an important contribution to protecting juvenile whitefish, but should also make clear to the Community our determination to achieve improvements to technical conservation measures which are essential to conserving stocks. We will be laying the necessary statutory instrument before Parliament after the Easter recess.

Potatoes

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has determined the market support prices for potatoes to apply in Great Britain for the 1991-92 crop year beginning 1 July.

Mr. Gummer: Agriculture Ministers have consulted the farmers' unions about the market support arrangements to apply for the 1991-92 crop year. Ministers have decided that the guaranteed price should remain £53 per tonne. They have, as in 1990-91, authorised the board to decide whether it wishes to support the market by entering into pre-season contracts with producers or by intervening directly, provided that total purchases do not exceed 500,000 tonnes. The target area for potato plantings by registered producers in Great Britain was fixed last August at 154,000 hectares.

WALES

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which areas in Wales have benefited as a result of the business rate revaluation.

Mr. David Hunt: The non-domestic rate revaluation factor for each district in Wales is shown in the following table:

Rating authority	*Revaluation factor*
Torfaen	6·6
Alyn and Deeside	6·9
Newport	7·1
Wrexham Maelor	7·3
Islwyn	7·5
Blaenau	7·6
Rhymney valley	7·6
Port Talbot	7·6
Cynon Valley	7·8
Montgomeryshire	7·8
Rhondda	7·9
Taff Ely	7·9
Colwyn	8·0
Glyndwr	8·0
Rhuddlan	8·0
Ynys Mon—Anglesey	8·2
Meirionnydd	8·3
Ogwr	8·3
Lliw Valley	8·3
Llanelli	8·6
Merthyr Tydfil	8·6
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8·7
Cardiff	8·7
Neath	8·7
Aberconwy	9·0
Vale of Glamorgan	9·0
Swansea	9·0
Ceredigion	9·1
Dwyfor	9·1
Delyn	9·3
South Pembrokeshire	9·3
Radnor	9·4
Monmouth	9·7
Arfon	9·9
Dinefwr	10·4
Brecknock	10·4
Carmarthen	10·6
WALES	8·5

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of Welsh businesses will have to pay the maximum increase under the uniform business rate in 1991-92; what percentage will see their rates bills fall in real terms; and what percentage will see no increase in real terms.

Mr. David Hunt: The effect of transitional arrangements on non-domestic rate bills in Wales for 1991-92 is that 65 per cent. of businesses will have a reduction or no change in real terms.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what transitional protection he has arranged following the introduction of the uniform business rate in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: In moving to the new business rating system, the contribution made by businesses towards local government spending in Wales has been maintained at the same level in real terms as in 1989-90. We recognised that some businesses would need time to adjust to the rate increases they faced following the revaluation of non-domestic property and the introduction of the uniform business rate. We therefore introduced transitional arrangements under which no occupier should have a rate increase of more than 20 per cent. in real terms in any year. For businesses which have rateable values below £10,000, the maximum increase should be 15 per cent. in real terms.

Community Charge

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and number of Welsh mixed hereditament businesses will benefit as a result of the initial review of the community charge.

Mr. David Hunt: Following our initial review of the community charge and the associated consultation document entitled "The Standard Community Charge and other matters", a number of changes affecting composite hereditaments were brought into force by means of the Non-Domestic Rating (Transitional Period) (Amendment and Further Revision) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/2329). This amended the transitional arrangements for non-domestic rates to reduce the maximum annual increase in rate bills from 15 to 10 per cent. in real terms for composite hereditaments with rateable values below £10,000. The chief valuer estimates that between 85 and 90 per cent. of mixed hereditaments in Wales will benefit.

Audiological Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the area health authorities in Wales which have a comprehensive audiological service for babies and young children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available centrally. It is for health authorities to determine the nature and level of audiological services provided within their districts, although I understand that the Welsh Medical Committee is currently reviewing the position in Wales for children who suffer from hearing loss.

Nurses' Grading

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh nursing clinical grading appeals are currently waiting to be heard at *(a)* district level, *(b)* national level and *(c)* United Kingdom level; and how many appeals have already been completed at each of those levels.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested in relation to nurse clinical grading appeals in Wales is as follows:

Appeal level	*Numbers of appeals*	
	Completed	*Outstanding*
District Health Authority	3,725	1,733
Wales Appeals Committee	151	1,188
GB—Negotiating Council	1	80

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects nursing clinical grading appeals will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Many more appeals are expected to come through at the all-Wales and negotiating council levels and, in view of the cumbersome and resource-intensive procedures, it is quite impossible to predict when the appeals process will be fully completed. At employing authority level, appeals have been completed in four of the nine districts in Wales. At the all-Wales level, agreement has recently been reached between the Department, management and staff sides on ways and means of speeding up the mechanics and I expect speedier progress to be made.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a breakdown of the total number of nursing clinical grading appeals already heard at national level, stating how many resulted in an appeal being upheld, rejected or a failure to agree.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Of the 151 appeals heard to date by the Welsh appeals committee the results have been as follows:

	Number
Upheld	34
Unsuccessful	4
Failure to agree	113

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the average cost associated with a single nursing clinical grading appeal hearing at *(a)* district level, *(b)* national level and *(c)* United Kingdom level.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available.

Seven-year-olds (Testing)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with teachers concerning the publication of national curriculum test results for seven-year-olds; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the publication of national curriculum test results for seven-year-olds in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the press announcement which I made on this issue on 20 February, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Primary schools will be required to inform parents of the individual results of the assessment of their children at the end of key stage 1—seven-year-old pupils. There will be no statutory requirement for schools to publish aggregate results more widely although they are encouraged to do so.

Future requirements for the collection and publication of data arising from the national curriculum assessment arrangements are still being determined. I will consult with the Curriculum Council for Wales, the School Examinations and Assessment Council, local education authorities and others on any proposed regulations.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the response to his consultation paper on the reform of agricultural tenancy law in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Consultees have until 13 May 1991 to put forward their views. Responses will then be considered carefully by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and me before any decisions are made.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any further changes to his Department's 1990-91 cash limits.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. The cash limit for Welsh Office/local authorities' capital is to be reduced by £14,274,000 from £367,588,000 to £353,314,000. At the same time, the cash limit for Welsh Office/Housing for Wales will increase by £14,274,000 from £92,183,000 to £106,457,000. These variations arise from the decisions of local authorities to transfer resources to Housing for Wales to enable housing associations to provide additional housing units.

These changes do not affect forecast outturn for the planning total published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

SCOTLAND

Fishing

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what directions have been given to fisheries officers with regard to any flexibility which might be permitted in the application of the eight-day tie-up rule, in circumstances where boats at sea are caught up in extreme weather conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Fishery officers have simply been told that, as is always the case when enforcing fisheries, where there is an immediate safety hazard they should take this into account in administering the scheme. Particular examples might be where a vessel was forced to divert to another port because of bad weather or where bad weather meant that it was having to ride out a storm at sea and unable to make port at all. In such circumstances a fisherman should contact the relevant fishery office as soon as the problem becomes apparent.

Crime Statistics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the numbers of children in age categories eight to 15 years and youths 16 to 20 years who have been convicted of offences in each of the last five years in *(a)* Dundee, *(b)* Tayside and *(c)* Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for the last five years for which information is available are given in the table.

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Persons aged 8-15 with a charge proved					
Dundee					
Crimes	24	38	24	13	2
Offences	4	12	11	4	2
Total	28	50	35	17	4
Tayside					
Crimes	66	73	66	29	5
Offences	31	21	25	7	3
Total	97	94	91	36	8
Scotland					
Crimes	356	265	218	251	210
Offences	160	127	112	129	111
Total	516	392	330	380	321
Persons aged 16-20 with a charge proved					
Dundee					
Crimes	1,279	1,252	1,248	1,044	1,000
Offences	1,213	1,222	1,196	1,038	906
Total	2,492	2,474	2,444	2,082	1,906
Tayside					
Crimes	2,344	2,286	2,298	1,889	1,824
Offences	2,513	2,364	2,469	2,167	2,093
Total	4,857	4,650	4,767	[1]4,056	[2]3,917
Scotland					
Crimes	26,449	25,592	24,153	22,379	20,567
Offences	30,031	28,908	27,697	25,581	23,608
Total	56,480	54,500	51,850	47,960	44,175

[1] Includes four cases where the district of origin within Tayside region is not known.
[2] Includes five cases where the district of origin within Tayside region is not known.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of recorded offences involving crimes of *(a)* indecency, *(b)* violence, *(c)* dishonesty, *(d)* fire-raising and vandalism, *(e)* theft of motor vehicles, *(f)* theft by opening lockfast places and *(g)* drugs, indicating their percentage of total recorded offences, in (i) Dundee, (ii) Tayside and (iii) Scotland, in each of the past five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police for selected crime/offence groupings and their percentage of total crimes and offences recorded

	Number					*Percentage*				
	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
(i) Dundee										
(a) Indecency	269	253	268	243	315	0·8	0·7	0·8	0·7	0·8
(b) Violence	590	561	580	623	600	1·9	1·6	1·7	1·8	1·6

	Number					Percentage				
	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
(c) Dishonesty	13,082	15,252	15,888	15,379	16,540	41·0	44·3	45·4	44·0	44·1
(d) Fire-raising and vandalism	3,300	3,423	3,278	2,898	3,623	10·3	9·9	9·4	8·3	9·7
(e) Theft of motor vehicles	652	605	545	563	585	2·0	1·8	1·6	1·6	1·6
(f) Theft by opening lockfast places	1,649	2,185	2,478	2,977	3,708	5·2	6·3	7·1	8·5	9·9
(g) Drugs	160	193	265	311	420	0·5	0·6	0·8	0·9	1·1
(ii) Tayside										
(a) Indecency	380	387	417	424	475	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·7
(b) Violence	971	949	1,048	1,095	1,088	1·6	1·5	1·6	1·6	1·5
(c) Dishonesty	22,441	25,378	25,996	24,260	25,982	36·7	39·2	38·6	35·2	37·0
(d) Fire-raising and vandalism	6,547	6,782	6,601	6,122	7,021	10·7	10·5	9·8	8·9	10·0
(e) Theft of motor vehicles	1,215	1,122	1,044	958	1,049	2·0	1·7	1·5	1·4	1·5
(f) Theft by opening lockfast places	2,718	3,369	3,656	4,207	4,785	4·4	5·2	5·4	6·1	6·8
(g) Drugs	319	368	470	561	646	0·5	0·6	0·7	0·8	0·9
(iii) Scotland										
(a) Indecency	5,741	5,354	5,266	5,057	5,742	0·7	0·7	0·6	0·6	0·6
(b) Violence	15,090	15,705	18,350	17,871	18,374	1·9	1·9	2·1	2·1	2·0
(c) Dishonesty	342,349	342,522	356,527	344,509	355,525	42·8	41·7	41·5	40·3	39·4
(d) Fire-raising and vandalism	79,545	78,891	76,444	73,518	79,062	9·9	9·6	8·9	8·6	8·8
(e) Theft of motor vehicles	29,938	28,036	26,183	26,395	29,064	3·7	3·4	3·1	3·1	3·2
(f) Theft by opening lockfast places	52,065	61,402	68,979	77,503	84,748	6·5	7·5	8·0	9·1	9·4
(g) Drugs	5,078	5,318	4,736	5,213	7,024	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·8

Notes:

1. Under violence are included all crimes in group 1 of The Scottish Office Home and Health Department (SOHHD) classification of crimes and offences.
2. Under fire-raising and vandalism are included all crimes in group 4 of the SOHHD classification.
3. Under theft by opening lockfast places are included opening lockfast places with intent to steal and attempted opening lockfast places with intent to steal.
4. Crimes in *(e)* and *(f)* above are included with other crimes of dishonesty in *(c)*.
5. Details of the SOHHD classification are given in the SOHHD statistical bulletin "Recorded crime in Scotland 1989", a copy of which is in the Library.

Motorways

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of motorway there are in Scotland; and what proportion of these are lit.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Of a total of 161·5 miles of motorway in Scotland, 27 miles are lit, which equates to approximately 17 per cent.

Miscarriages of Justice

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the effectiveness of the procedure for reviewing alleged miscarriages of justice.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Alleged miscarriages of justice in Scotland may be reviewed by the High Court of Justiciary either when an appeal is made from the court of first instance or when a case is referred to the High Court by the Secretary of State in terms of section 263(1) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975. In circumstances where such a reference might be inappropriate, the Secretary of State may make a recommendation to Her Majesty concerning exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy.

Any convicted person may petition the Secretary of State seeking review of his case. The validity, weight and significance of any fresh evidence or any other issue raised is carefully assessed in every case and, where appropriate, consideration given to a reference to the High Court of Justiciary. Between 1984 and 1990 on average 50 persons petitioned the Secretary of State in each year; and three cases were referred to the High Court, the conviction being quashed in each case.

Food Costs

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount of money allocated for food per prisoner per day in each prison in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cost of food for prisoners is determined by the weekly ration sheet based on an approved dietary scale. On that basis, the average daily food cost per prisoner in Scotland is £1·19.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount of money allocated for food per hospital patient per day in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available in the form requested.

It is for each health board to decide on how much of its total revenue allocation it will spend on catering services, including food provisions. In arriving at that decision the

board will have regard to the advice of dietitians on the dietary requirements of patients in the different care groups.

Agriculture

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* ewes and shearlings, *(b)* dairy cows and *(c)* breeding sows and gilts there were in Scotland (i) in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and (ii) on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information set out in the table shows the figures recorded in the June agricultural censuses of main holdings in Scotland.

thousands

	Average 1979 to 1981[1]	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Ewes and gimmers[2]	3,136·8	3,377·2	3,463·7	3,569·2	3,639·7	3,686·5
Dairy cows[3]	283·1	269·9	263·8	250·5	246·5	242·5
Breeding sows and gilts[4]	50·9	42·0	44·4	47·5	47·0	50·7

[1] The figures in this column are not directly comparable with those for the later years. Between June 1986 and June 1987, 5,995 holdings were removed from the main census; at June 1986 there were 88 thousand ewes and gimmers kept for breeding, 147 dairy cows and 97 breeding sows and gilts on these holdings.
[2] Ewes and gimmers, at June of year stated, used for breeding in previous season.
[3] Dairy cows and heifers in milk and dairy cows in calf but not in milk.
[4] Sows and gilts in pig and other sows for breeding.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares of *(a)* cereals and *(b)* potatoes were grown in Scotland (i) in each of the five years from 1986 to 1990 and (ii) on average for the years between 1979 and 1981, inclusive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information set out in the table shows the figures recorded in the June agricultural censuses of main holdings in Scotland.

Thousand hectares

	Cereals[2]	*Potatoes*[3]
Average 1979 to 1981[1]	505·5	34·2
1986	534·3	29·9
1987	520·7	29·0
1988	523·8	28·3
1989	506·0	27·7
1990	478·3	27·2

[1] The figures in this column are not directly comparable with those for later years. Between June 1986 and June 1987, 5,995 holdings were removed from the main census; at June 1986 there were 1,013 hectares of cereals and 206 hectares of potatoes on these holdings.
[2] Includes wheat, triticale, barley, oats and mixed grain for threshing.
[3] Includes potatoes for seed and ware.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many agricultural holdings there were in Scotland in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The number of holdings included in the June agricultural censuses of main holdings in Scotland were as follows:

	thousands
1980	31·4
1985	31·3
[1]1990	27·2

[1] The figure for 1990 is not directly comparable with those for the earlier years. Between June 1986 and June 1987, 5,995 holdings were removed from the main census.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time farmers there were in Scotland in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information set out in the table shows the figures recorded in the June agricultural censuses of main holdings in Scotland.

thousands

	1980	*1985*	*1990*
Full-time occupiers	14·1	13·9	12·9
Part-time occupiers[1]	9·0	9·8	8·6

[1] The figure for 1990 is not directly comparable with those for earlier years. Between June 1986 and June 1987, 5,995 holdings were removed from the main census; at June 1986 there were 3,480 part-time occupiers on these holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of investment by the agricultural industry in Scotland in *(a)* plant and machinery, *(b)* vehicles, *(c)* buildings and *(d)* works, in 1979, 1980, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available (i) in cash terms and (ii) at fixed prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* Figures showing the levels of investment in Scottish agriculture are set out in the table, with the exception of separate figures for buildings and works, which are unavailable.

£ million

	Plant and machinery	*Vehicles*	*Buildings and works*
1979			
Current prices	61·5	3·8	70·5
Constant 1985 prices	90·7	5·9	104·1
1980			
Current prices	53·5	3·4	98·7
Constant 1985 prices	67·4	4·6	110·3
1985			
Current prices	71·4	7·4	97·3
Constant 1985 prices	71·4	7·4	97·3

	Plant and machinery	Vehicles	Buildings and works
1989			
Current prices	73·2	8·7	54·1
Constant 1985 prices	58·1	6·6	43·6

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of workers engaged in agriculture in Scotland in 1980, 1985 and 1990, respectively, *(a)* in total and *(b)* whole time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information set out in the table shows the figures recorded in the June agricultural censuses of main holdings in Scotland.

thousands

	1980	1985	1990
Total workers[1,2]	40·6	34·0	27·9
Of which: full time	28·9	25·0	20·0

[1]The figure for 1990 is not directly comparable with those for the earlier years. Between June 1986 and June 1987, 5,995 holdings were removed from the main census; at June 1986 there were 463 workers on these holdings.

[2]Includes full-time and part-time regular staff, and casual and seasonal workers; excludes occupiers and spouses working on holdings.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tractors were acquired by the agriculture industry in Scotland *(a)* in total and *(b)* of 40 kW and over, in 1979, 1985 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* Figures on the number of tractors acquired by the agriculture industry are not available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross local authority capital expenditure on *(a)* all regional services, *(b)* education services, *(c)* roads and transport, *(d)* social work and *(e)* district council non-housing services at constant prices for each year from 1978-79 to 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information at constant 1989-90 prices is set out in the table for each of local authorities' six main non-housing capital programmes. Information about 1990-91 and 1991-92 will be known only after the end of those financial years.

£ million

	Roads and Transport	Water and Sewerage	Police	Education	Social Work	General services			Total
						Regions and Islands		Districts	
1978-79	217·740	145·853	13·138	129·109	19·249	—	185·002	—	710·091
1979-80	209·134	170·729	13·456	106·132	22·022	—	196·563	—	718·036
1980-81	160·659	151·812	14·382	94·559	20·181	—	159·629	—	601·222
1981-82	191·987	145·530	12·668	99·345	20·682	—	147·714	—	617·925
1982-83	189·892	122·556	13·539	83·919	20·577	—	166·987	—	597·471
1983-84	188·901	133·626	14·161	72·423	23·436	—	142·560	—	575·107
1984-85	185·981	128·353	13·660	67·997	28·248	—	143·760	—	568·001
1985-86	208·669	119·362	14·664	73·902	26·500	—	132·422	—	575·519
1986-87	193·311	125·838	15·737	66·511	20·030	—	130·369	—	551·795
1987-88	158·608	113·540	19·539	70·574	22·005	76·190	—	90·834	551·289
1988-89	151·353	119·564	20·313	78·825	24·796	81·163	—	93·240	569·255
1989-90	176·717	128·988	18·962	81·593	24·449	60·352	—	109·800	600·861

Note:
Figures are at constant 1989-90 prices, as measured by the GDP deflator. For general services, total district council expenditure is readily available only for the latest three years. General services expenditure up to 1986-87 is for regions, islands and districts.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the capital allocations, disaggregated into blocks, for 1991-92 for each local authority in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information is as follows:

£'000

	Roads and transport	Water and sewerage	Police	Education	Social work	General services	Total
Borders Region	4,200	4,500	—	3,453	430	1,200	13,783
Berwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	500	500
Ettrick and Lauderdale	—	—	—	—	—	500	500
Roxburgh	—	—	—	—	—	600	600
Tweeddale	—	—	—	—	—	200	200
Central Region	4,400	7,800	326	3,914	1,340	1,400	19,180
Clackmannan	—	—	—	—	—	500	500
Falkirk	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,000
Stirling	—	—	—	—	—	850	850
Dumfries and Galloway Region	6,300	7,000	2,250	3,010	780	1,200	20,540
Annandale and Eskdale	—	—	—	—	—	250	250
Nithsdale	—	—	—	—	—	350	350
Stewartry	—	—	—	—	—	250	250
Wigtown	—	—	—	—	—	700	700
Fife Region	8,300	11,500	543	5,530	1,440	2,300	29,613

	Roads and transport	Water and sewerage	Police	Education	Social work	General services	Total
Dunfermline	—	—	—	—	—	1,250	1,250
Kirkcaldy	—	—	—	—	—	1,200	1,200
North East Fife	—	—	—	—	—	400	400
Grampian Region	12,000	18,500	196	8,303	2,065	1,000	42,064
Aberdeen City	—	—	—	—	—	1,600	1,600
Banff and Buchan	—	—	—	—	—	550	550
Gordon	—	—	—	—	—	600	600
Kincardine and Deeside	—	—	—	—	—	360	360
Moray	—	—	—	—	—	450	450
Highland Region	12,500	10,000	—	3,849	1,015	3,270	30,634
Badenoch and Strathspey	—	—	—	—	—	160	160
Caithness	—	—	—	—	—	350	350
Inverness	—	—	—	—	—	600	600
Lochaber	—	—	—	—	—	400	400
Nairn	—	—	—	—	—	260	260
Ross and Cromarty	—	—	—	—	—	750	750
Skye and Lochalsh	—	—	—	—	—	300	300
Sutherland	—	—	—	—	—	350	350
Lothian Region	14,400	19,500	—	6,918	2,935	1,500	45,253
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	500	500
Edinburgh City	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,000
Midlothian	—	—	—	—	—	560	560
West Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	1,250	1,250
Strathclyde Region	75,600	65,000	3,447	28,561	9,715	9,000	191,323
Argyle and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	825	825
Bearsden and Milngavie	—	—	—	—	—	350	350
Clydebank	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,000
Clydesdale	—	—	—	—	—	730	730
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	—	—	—	—	—	600	600
Cumnock and Doon Valley	—	—	—	—	—	850	850
Cunninghame	—	—	—	—	—	950	950
Dunbarton	—	—	—	—	—	1,100	1,100
East Kilbride	—	—	—	—	—	900	900
Eastwood	—	—	—	—	—	200	200
Glasgow City	—	—	—	—	—	4,000	4,000
Hamilton	—	—	—	—	—	2,000	2,000
Inverclyde	—	—	—	—	—	1,500	1,500
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	—	—	—	—	—	700	700
Kyle and Carrick	—	—	—	—	—	800	800
Monklands	—	—	—	—	—	1,400	1,400
Motherwell	—	—	—	—	—	3,600	3,600
Renfrew	—	—	—	—	—	1,200	1,200
Strathkelvin	—	—	—	—	—	950	950
Tayside Region	9,500	14,800	1,202	3,956	1,840	1,900	33,198
Angus	—	—	—	—	—	750	750
Dundee City	—	—	—	—	—	1,800	1,800
Perth and Kinross	—	—	—	—	—	800	800
Islands Areas	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Orkney	3,600	1,500	—	765	100	400	6,365
Shetland	4,300	—	—	1,754	150	750	6,954
Western Isles	5,000	2,100	—	3,278	380	1,100	11,858
Total	160,100	162,200	7,964	73,291	22,190	70,615	496,360

Green House Programme

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether a parallel programme to the Department of the Environment's green house programme for local authority housing will be implemented in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* I was pleased to announce on Monday 25 March that an additional £2 million is being made available in 1991-92 to promote an energy efficiency and savings initiative in the six local authorities with the largest number of houses suffering condensation and dampness.

The main aims of the programme will be to promote the wider application of energy efficiency measures to provide affordable heating for tenants, as well as to reduce harmful emissions to the atmosphere through energy savings. My intention under this initiative is that resources will be provided to support local authority projects which best meet these aims.

The Scottish Office will shortly be exploring with Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Falkirk and Motherwell district councils the uses to which these extra resources can best be put. I shall announce the distribution of these new resources as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Dubai Defence Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 28 February, column *615*, he will set out *(a)* the purpose of his departmental representation at the Dubai 91 aerospace and defence exhibition, *(b)* the

projected cost and expected benefits of departmental representation and *(c)* the number and grades of departmental personnel planned to attend.

Mr. Alan Clark: Representatives from my Department will provide marketing support to United Kingdom exhibitors, in accordance with Government policy. The direct costs of this representation will be approximately £18,000. The number and grade of staff attending have yet to be decided.

Education and Training

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recent initiatives by his Department in support of higher-level education and training.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has decided to create a chair in defence engineering. Following a competition among a number of universities, we have awarded the chair on the basis of a joint bid by University college London (UCL) and King's college London.

The chair will have three objectives: to establish a centre of excellence in engineering and procurement matters relating to defence; to raise further the public profile and professional standards of civilian engineers in the Ministry of Defence; and to provide further education and training for MOD engineers.

The chair will conduct research in engineering issues of particular interest to the MOD, and intends to provide, from October 1991, a one-year MSc course in the management of defence engineering. The MOD will send about 10 of its brightest young civilian engineers to attend the course, and it is hoped that additional students will be attracted from the United Kingdom and overseas. We also propose to take the opportunity to rationalise in due course the provision of training in naval architecture, which we have sponsored for many years at UCL, by placing this under the aegis of the new chair.

Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about agency status for the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The chemical defence establishment at Porton Down will become a defence support agency on 1 April. The director of the establishment, Dr. G. S. Pearson, has been appointed the chief executive and will be known as the director general.

We are taking the opportunity of this new status to change the name of the establishment to the "chemical and biological defence establishment"—CBDE—to reflect more accurately its existing role in both chemical and biological defence.

There will be no change in the role of the agency. Its aim will continue to be to ensure that the British armed forces are protected from any chemical and biological warfare agents that might be used against them by an aggressor. The establishment's expertise is used to support the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments. In particular, the establishment provides scientific and technical advice in support of the arms control negotiations in the field of chemical and biological weapons. It will continue to contribute to the negotiations at the conference on disarmament in Geneva aimed at achieving a comprehensive, effectively verifiable and global ban on chemical weapons. Research at CBDE also helps to improve health and safety in a wide range of civil activities—for example, the hazards from accidents in the chemical industry, detection of atmospheric pollutants, respiratory protection against toxic fumes and fire hazards and medical countermeasures applicable to the pesticide industry.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said to the House on 18 October 1989, at columns 154-55, defence support agencies will be run on "next steps" lines but will remain within the defence chain of command. Such agencies are established within the MOD's new management strategy, under which we aim to secure better value for money for the defence budget through closer alignment of financial accountability with line management responsibilities, and by a system of performance reviews.

The establishment of the chemical and biological defence establishment as a defence support agency is another significant landmark in this process. The professional and internationally recognised standards which have contributed to the success of work at Porton Down for the last 75 years will continue to be upheld. The greater freedom and flexibility now granted to the director general will provide him with new opportunities to enhance the establishment's successful role.

The move to agency status will build upon CBDE's international reputation as a centre of scientific excellence by further improving the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the work carried out by the establishment. In order to bring about these improvements, the director general has accordingly been set a range of challenging key performance targets.

These are as follows:

(a) in 1991-92, to achieve, within agreed time scales, 80 per cent. of the chemical biological defence programme milestones required by the service chiefs of staff, and to seek progressive improvements in performance in future years;

(b) in 1991-92, to achieve, to agreed cost, 80 per cent. of the chemical biological defence programme milestones required by the service chiefs of staff, and to seek progressive improvements in performance in future years;

(c) to sustain the CBDE research programme and the capability of CBDE to respond effectively to operational emergencies by maintaining scientific and technical staff at least to the current proportion of 65 per cent. of the total planned manpower;

(d) to increase the overall efficiency of CBDE by more than 1.5 per cent. over the financial year 1991-92;

(e) to reduce progressively the full unit cost per scientific productive hour initially by 2 per cent. in the year ending 31 March 1993;

(f) to continue and extend the programme of efficiency reviews and where appropriate market testing of support services and implement a programme for further studies so that more than 60 per cent. by cost of the support area has been reviewed by 31 March 1992 and thereby identify scope for programme cost reductions in future years;

(g) to review and improve the existing resource allocation and cost attribution system by 31 March 1992 in order to identify and reduce unit costs;

(h) to develop the capacity of CBDE for corporate and business planning, and to produce revised plans and targets by 1 April 1992; and

(j) to refine the customer/supplier objective setting procedures which set targets for timeliness and cost and to incorporate a mechanism for implementation in 1992 which will permit the customer to assess the quality of output in terms of research and of scientific and technical advice.

I wish the director general and his staff every success in the coming years.

Non-nuclear Research Establishments

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress made towards establishing the defence non-nuclear research establishments as an executive agency.

Mr. Tom King: I am pleased to announce the creation of the Defence Research Agency which will be vested as an executive agency on 1 April this year. The agency will comprise the four main non-nuclear research establishments, the Admiralty Research Establishment, the Royal Aerospace Establishment, the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment, and the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment.

The Defence Research Agency—DRA—will provide the expert scientific and technical services required of it primarily by the MOD but also other Government Departments, in a way which is cost-effective and where necessary impartial; in support of this, the DRA is also encouraged to provide services to non-Exchequer customers. The DRA will continue to represent Her Majesty's Government in its participation in international and collaborative activities.

An open competition has been mounted to select and appoint a chief executive for the next three to five years; the outcome should be determined by early May. Meanwhile Mr. Nigel Hughes, now chief executive (designate), will act as chief executive from 1 April.

The chief executive will have the financial and personnel powers which are set out in the agency's published framework document, copies of which will be placed in the Library shortly. Where hon. or right hon. Members have queries on matters relating to the operation of the Defence Research Agency I hope they will write in the first instance to the chief executive. I will continue to deal with questions of policy.

I will be setting the agency a range of targets to ensure that it delivers progressive improvements in the quality and efficiency of the services it supplies to its customers. The initial targets I have set for the Defence Research Agency during the period 1991-96 are:

(a) to achieve efficiency improvements of an average of 2¼ per cent. per annum over the next five years, by delivering a saving of £10 million in 1991-92 and a reduction of an average of 2¼ per cent. per annum in terms of full cost per chargeable hour in the following four years;

(b) to develop in 1991-92 a programme for asset rationalisation against which targets will be set for the following years;
to improve asset utilisation, defined as the ratio of turnover to average fixed assets, including those leased; and
to reduce the total value of fixed assets employed in the business in accordance with the programme by a combination of rationalisation and reduced leasing;

(c) to keep within the budget agreed for the DRA;

(d) to complete 80 per cent. of orders and contracts due for completion during the review period and valued at more than £5 million, within budget, taking account of any negotiated changes, and to increase this proportion to 90 per cent. by the end of 1995-96;

(e) within orders and contracts, to achieve 50 per cent. of milestones within plus or minus one month, and increase this by 5 per cent. per annum over five years;

(f) to improve the perceived quality of service to customers, as indicated by annual customer satisfaction surveys;

(g) to enhance existing management information systems, and to develop and implement an internal output and performance measurement system by October 1991;

(h) to introduce a commercial accounting system by 1 October 1991, to train 70 per cent. of potential users of the system by the same date, and complete initial training of all staff who need to use it by 1 April 1992; and

(j) to introduce arrangements from 1 October 1991 to give MOD customers information on the cost and quality of work done for them by the DRA to support a tautened customer/supplier relationship and to prepare progressively for subsequent trading fund operation.

I wish the chief executive and his staff every success for the future in meeting their objectives of providing greater quality of service and better value for money.

Directorate General of Defence Accounts

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the establishment of the Directorate General of Defence Accounts as a defence support agency.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Directorate General of Defence Accounts—DGDA—is to become a defence support agency on 1 April 1991.

The chief executive will be the present incumbent, Mr. M. J. Dymond.

The DGDA's role is to provide accountancy services to the MOD. It pays bills, civilian salaries and wages, makes superannuation awards, recovers moneys due, maintains the central ledger, produces the appropriation account and provides accounting advice and data. Its role is crucial to the successful implementation of new management strategy for defence. The DGDA's systems will provide much of the financial information which is needed to run the new devolved management structures.

The DGDA provides a high-quality professional service. It will aim to achieve new standards of excellence in dealings between the agency and its customers. To this end, the chief executive has been set demanding targets covering all areas of performance.

Agency status will give the DGDA the freedoms and flexibilities it needs to perform its role more effectively and efficiently, providing continuous improvements in the quality of the service it offers to users.

The chief executive's targets for the early years are:

(a) to develop and agree service level agreements for each of the DGDA's functions and tasks with customers by 31 July 1991 and thereafter to meet agreed time, cost and quality of service criteria as laid down in individual service level agreements;

(b) to reduce the turnaround time of civilian travel claims from 15 to 10 working days by 31 March 1992;

(c) to introduce a two-weekly billing timetable for bills by the end of 1991-92;

(d) to reduce throughput errors in DGDA in the following areas:
—non-industrial pay to 3 per cent.; industrial pay by 1 per cent.; pensions to 2 per cent.; civilian travel claims to 2 per cent.; and bill payment by 2 per cent.

(e) to carry out agreed tasks to time, standard and within budget;

(f) to achieve a sustained improvement in overall efficiency reflected in the budgeted costs of the following indicators: cost per pay account, cost per travel claim, cost per bill, cost per receipt and cost per pensions award;

(g) to achieve efficiency improvements of at least £450,000 in 1991-92;

(h) to produce a saving in the overall defence budget of £450,000 by the introduction of revised selective checking procedures in the D Acs (Bills) area;

(j) to review existing internal management information systems and identify management requirements by 30 August 1991, and to develop and implement systems, including unit cost measurement, capable of measuring performance of the agency more effectively by 27 March 1992;

(k) to review the systems and resources required to carry out the agreed tasks and meet targets set for MOD HQ in "Options for Change", with the aim of reducing the net cost of the agency to the MOD and of minimising spare capacity where possible. Where spare capacity cannot be eliminated, to seek to utilise it by expanding the customer base in accordance with the business development strategy.

I wish the chief executive and his staff every success in their new status.

Territorial Army

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which items in a Territorial Army unit's budget for 1992 are to be included in cash terms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The items which may be included in a unit's budget in cash terms are pay, earnings-related national insurance contributions, training expenses allowance, bounty, travel costs and subsistence.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what man training day allocations are to be made to Territorial Army units in 1992 by category.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am unable to give the information requested as, due to the introduction of the new management strategy, man training day allocations are devolved to the chain of command and hence made unit by unit according to role and training need.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the principal units in the Territorial Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The principal units of the Territorial Army are:

2	Army Reconnaissance Regiments
3	Light Reconnaissance Regiments
2	Field Artillery Regiments
4	Air Defence Regiments
8	Engineer Regiments
41	Infantry Battalions
2	Special Air Service Regiments
1	Honourable Artillery Company
11	Royal Signal Regiments
12	Royal Corps Transport Regiments
10	General Hospital (RAMC)
3	Field Hospital (RAMC)
1	Evacuation Hospital (RAMC)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many drill halls the Territorial Army has, by region.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The regional deployment of Territorial Army centres is as follows:

Tavra Region	*Number of Territorial Army centres*
Highland	42
Lowland	38
North East	41
Yorkshire & Humberside	50
East Midlands	53
East Anglia	28
South East	33
Eastern Wessex	31
Western Wessex	36
North West	54
West Midlands	47
Northern Ireland	30
Wales	39
Greater London	57

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide the hon. Member for Canterbury with the most recent report of the Territorial Army national employers liaison committee.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the additional costs of a Territorial Army parachute battalion as against a non-parachute Territorial Army infantry battalion; and what are the principal items which incur these extra costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Gulf War

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what attempts have been made since 27 February by the United Kingdom, the allied military coalition, or the United Nations to establish the nationalities of those people killed by allied attacks on road convoys at Mutla hill, Kuwait and Umm Qasr road on 26-27 February.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personal effects of bodies buried by British personnel have been passed to the International Committee of the Red Cross, in accordance with our obligations under the first Geneva convention. I understand that other members of the coalition followed the same practice.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British prisoners of war released by Iraq were physically abused while under Iraqi custody.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Indications from initial debriefing of British prisoners of war released by Iraq are that their treatment in captivity was varied, ranging from serious beatings at some sites, in breach of Iraq's obligations under the third Geneva convention, to relatively good conditions and medical attention at others.

Coldstream Guards

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the reason 20 selected recruits to the Coldstream Guards were advised that they could not join the regiment as planned in November 1990 and would have to wait until April 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: As a result of pressures on the defence budget, restrictions on enlistments to the Army have meant that some regiments, including the Coldstream Guards, have had to defer the entry date of prospective recruits.

Army Regiments

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army regiments that have spent up to their financial quota imposed by his Department are now funding recruits out of regimental funds until the start of the new financial year.

Mr. Alan Clark: No regiments are using their regimental funds to fund recruits.

EMPLOYMENT

Social Charter

11. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met Mrs. Papandreou to discuss the social charter.

Mr. Howard: I met Mrs. Papandreou on 14 January to discuss the Commission's social action programme and priorities for social affairs in the Community in 1991. I put to her some specific proposals for improving the procedures adopted by the Commission in the social affairs field which I am pleased to say she has now accepted.

Port of Goole (Accidents)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of recorded accidents which have taken place at the port of Goole in the course of the employment of dockers, stevedores and dock workers for each year since 1985.

Mr. Forth: The table shows the number of injuries to employees in services supporting water transport in Boothferry and Scunthorpe, the local authority areas covering the port of Goole, reported to the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 for the period requested:

Year (1 April to 31 March)	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Over 3-day*	*Total*
1986-87	—	1	2	3
1987-88	—	—	4	4
1988-89	—	1	7	8
1989-90	—	1	8	9

It is not possible to give separate injury statistics for dockers, stevedores and dock workers, as these are not individually identified within the reporting category. Nor can the number of separate accidents causing these injuries by identified.

Advertising

18. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what his Department spent on advertising and promotional material in 1985-86 and what is the total budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: The Department's expenditure on advertising and promotional material in 1985-86 was £17·1 million. The total budget for 1990-91 is £29 million.

Health and Safety Executive

20. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the Government grant in aid of the Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Estimates provide for grant in aid to the Health and Safety Commission in 1991-92 of £140 million; an increase of £20 million over the 1990-91 level. Full details of Health and Safety Commission and Executive plans for use of these resources will be published in the plan of work for 1991-92 and beyond in the spring.

Career Development Loans

21. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money has been made available under career development loans to individuals to assist them in training.

Mr. Howard: At the end of February 1991 the three participating banks had lent almost £40 million to more than 16,000 individuals.

Wakefield TEC

22. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met the chairman of the Wakefield TEC to discuss training provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I intend to meet the chairman of Wakefield TEC on 15 April to discuss a range of training and enterprise issues. Wakefield TEC has provided creative and imaginative plans. I am confident that these will substantially benefit the economy of the Wakefield area.

Employment Rehabilitation Service

23. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the work of the employment rehabilitation service.

Mr. Jackson: The employment rehabilitation service offers specialist assessment and rehabilitation to help people with disabilities get back to work or to enter training. It is already very successful. Plans for further improvements were announced in the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" and comments made on how to implement them most effectively are being carefully considered.

Government Training Schemes

24. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people under the age of 25 years secured full-time employment in 1990 as a result of Government-sponsored training schemes.

Mr. Jackson: Of those under 25 years, 63 per cent. of those leaving YT and 32 per cent. of those leaving ET went into full-time employment.

Unemployment

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of people unemployed in the London borough of Wandsworth on 21 March.

Mr. Jackson: On the latest count date of 7 February 1991 there were 10,959 on the unadjusted basis.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 27 March 1991

ENERGY

Energy Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 26 February, column *448*, when he expects the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1991" to be published.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is expected that the 1991 edition of the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics" will be published at the end of July, as in previous years. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Gas-fired Boilers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to bring forward proposals to implement the EC directive on the energy efficiency of gas-fired domestic boilers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The form and content of this draft directive are still under discussion and it is too early to say when a draft will be ready to be considered for adoption by the Community. If it is adopted, subsequent implementation in this country will proceed within the timetable which will be set in the directive.

Coal

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any proposals to amend the Coal Industry Act to put an obligation on British Coal to protect existing coal reserves.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the Coal Industry Acts 1946 to 1990, the British Coal Corporation has a statutory duty to secure the efficient development of the coal industry. The Government have announced their intention to privatise the coal industry after the next election, which will involve a change to the existing legislation.

Rye House Power Station

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how long the Rye House power station in Hertfordshire has been decommissioned.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The decommissioning of the old Rye House power station was completed by the end of 1982.

Offshore Safety

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress he has made in implementing the recommendation of the Cullen report into the Piper Alpha disaster that responsibility for the regulation of offshore safety should be transferred to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Wakeham: I announced on 12 November, *Official Report*, column 330, the Government's acceptance of all the recommendations for improving offshore safety made by Lord Cullen in his report on the Piper Alpha disaster. These included the establishment of a single regulatory body to deal with offshore safety which, on balance, he recommended should be part of the Health and Safety Executive. It follows that the Health and Safety Commission will be responsible for taking forward Lord Cullen's other recommendations. I also announced in November that ministerial responsibility for offshore safety matters in Great Britain would, with the approval of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, be transferred to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

I am pleased to announce that, following the completion of the necessary detailed preparatory work, and with the agreement of the Health and Safety Commission, the staff of the offshore safety division of the Department of Energy, together with certain staff from the Department of Transport, will, with effect from 1 April 1991, be transferred to the HSE. They will form the core of a new division, which will be considerably strengthened to enable it to continue to enforce the existing regime for the regulation of offshore safety and to carry forward the successful development and implementation of changes recommended by Lord Cullen.

It is clear that a significant increase in the resources available to the HSE will be necessary to enable it to carry out its new responsibilities. Agreement has been reached on this with the HSC and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who will be assuming ministerial responsibility from the same date, will be seeking authority for the necessary additional resources by means of a supplementary estimate.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Community Charge

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will bring forward proposals for ensuring that community charge non-payers are not recorded on the general register of county court judgments on debts.

The Attorney-General: The regulations that govern the operation of the Register of County Court Judgments do not at present provide for information about community charge non-payers to be recorded, since community charge is enforced through magistrates courts.

Female Circumcision

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General on how many cases relating to female circumcision the Director of Public Prosecutions has received papers since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No papers have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions in cases in which a prosecution under the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 has been sought.

Cases concerning female circumcision may also be prosecuted as offences of causing grievous bodily harm contrary to the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Information on whether any papers have been referred

seeking prosecutions under this Act in such circumstances is not, however, readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Record Office

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the running costs limit for the Public Record Office.

The Attorney-General: The running cost limit for the Public Record Office will be decreased by £69,000 from £16,754,000 to £16,685,000 to compensate for a breach in the running cost limit in 1989-90. This follows the normal practice of reducing the limit for one financial year by the amount of any overspend in the previous year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the year-on percentage change in the retail prices index *(a)* excluding the community charge and mortgage interest payments for each month since April 1989, *(b)* excluding rates and mortgage interest payments for each month between June 1987 and April 1989 and *(c)* excluding mortgage interest payments for each month since June 1987.

Mr. Maples: The following table gives the information:

Retail prices index—percentage change over 12 months

	All items excluding mortgage interest payments and Community Charge/ Rates	*All items excluding mortgage interest payments*
1987		
June	3·4	3·5
July	3·5	3·7
August	3·5	3·7
September	3·4	3·5
October	3·7	3·9
November	3·8	4·0
December	3·8	3·9
1988		
January	3·5	3·7
February	3·5	3·6
March	3·6	3·8
April	4·0	4·2
May	4·2	4·4
June	4·5	4·7
July	4·8	5·0
August	4·9	5·0
September	5·0	5·2
October	5·0	5·1
November	5·0	5·1
December	4·9	5·1
1989		
January	5·4	5·5
February	5·5	5·7
March	5·6	5·7
April	5·9	5·9
May	5·8	6·0
June	5·8	5·9
July	5·7	5·8
August	5·5	5·7
September	5·7	5·8
October	5·9	6·1
November	5·9	6·1
December	6·0	6·1
1990		
January	5·9	6·7
February	6·0	6·2
March	6·2	6·3
April	6·5	7·9
May	7·0	8·1
June	6·9	8·2
July	7·0	8·3
August	7·9	9·1
September	8·3	9·5
October	8·4	9·5
November	8·0	9·2
December	7·7	9·0
1991		
January	7·4	8·5
February	7·5	8·6

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables for the financing of local authority expenditure in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, in a form comparable to table 5.13 of Cm 1520, but analysing the financing of local authority expenditure as defined in table 5·6 rather than the financing of local authority expenditure on a national accounts basis.

Mr. Mellor: The table shows the financing of local authority expenditure as defined in table 5.6 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement" —Cm 1520—for the United Kingdom.

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Grants in Aggregate External Finance	13,230	14,130	15,160	15,560	16,100
Other grants	6,570	7,200	7,510	7,380	9,200
Rates (net of all rebates)	13,860	15,720	17,140	19,130	20,780
Trading surpluses, interest and dividend	1,230	1,330	1,390	1,680	2,090
Rents	3,090	3,040	3,040	3,190	3,150
Borrowing from central government (PWLB)	5,750	5,720	4,090	4,940	2,260
from other sources	−4,080	−5,570	−2,740	−4,600	−940
Other receipts	−150	510	−600	−150	250
Total income	39,500	42,080	44,990	47,130	52,890

The footnotes in table 5.13 of Cm 1520 still apply except that "other grants" excludes the repayment of VAT and "other receipts" excludes the imputed income from non-trading capital.

Data are not held in a form which allows a disaggregation of the above table by territory, except at disproportionate cost.

Denationalisation

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of jobs *(a)* in total and *(b)* as full-time equivalent that have been subject to denationalisation since 1979-80.

Mr. Maude: At least 910,000 jobs in total—at least 885,000 full-time equivalent—have been transferred to the private sector due to privatisation since 1979-80.

Gross Domestic Product Deflators

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the derivation of the financial year gross domestic product market price deflators now used in Cm 1520, together with a similar derivation for the financial year gross domestic product market price deflator without adjustment for the effect of the introduction of the community charge.

Mr. Mellor: The GDP market price deflator for past years is calculated from the ratio of data on cash and constant price figures for GDP at market prices. Figures for the current year and future years are Treasury forecasts. Details of the method used to adjust the GDP deflator series to remove the discontinuity associated with the abolition of domestic rates, are given in paragraphs 7 to 12 of appendix A of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm 1520. The unadjusted GDP deflator series consistent with the adjusted figures published in Cm 1520 is:

	Unadjusted GDP deflator (1989-90 = 100)
1963-64	11·2
1964-65	11·7
1965-66	12·3
1966-67	12·8
1967-68	13·2
1968-69	13·8
1969-70	14·6
1970-71	15·8
1971-72	17·2
1972-73	18·6
1973-74	19·9
1974-75	23·8
1975-76	29·9
1976-77	33·9
1977-78	38·6
1978-79	42·8
1979-80	49·9
1980-81	59·1
1981-82	64·8
1982-83	69·4
1983-84	72·6
1984-85	76·3
1985-86	80·4
1986-87	83·2
1987-88	87·7
1988-89	94·1
1989-90	100·0
1990-91	106·0
1991-92	112·4
1992-93	117·7
1993-94	121·8

Balance of Payments

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in descending order of balance of payment performance *(a)* agriculture as a whole, *(b)* agriculture minus cereals, *(c)* the cereal sector, *(d)* coal, *(e)* steel, *(f)* electrical, *(g)* chemical and *(h)* invisibles.

Mr. Mellor: The balance of payments surplus on invisibles for 1990 is currently estimated at £5·1 billion. Visible trade information is not available for specific commodities on a balance of payments basis: the following table shows 1990 crude trade balances (1) for the nearest classes of goods on an overseas trade statistics basis.

£ billion

SITC[2]		*Crude Balance*[1]
5	Chemicals	+2·3
67	Iron and steel	+0·4
04	Cereals and cereal preparations	+0·3
32	Coal, coke and briquettes	−0·5
716, 75–77	Electrical machinery	−3·3
	Agriculture[3]	−6·4
	Agriculture[3] less cereals and cereal preparations	−6·1

[1] Exports cif less imports fob.
[2] Standard International Trade Classification (Rev. 3).
[3] There is no generally accepted definition of agriculture in the SITC. The figures used cover food and live animals, feed, beverages and other agricultural products (SITC Sections 0, 1 and 4; Division 22 and parts of Divisions 21, 26, 29, 51, 53, 55 and 59).

Finance Bill

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Finance Bill will be published.

Mr. Mellor: The Finance Bill will be published on Wednesday 17 April.

Civil Service Catering Organisation

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the recommendation of the Treasury working party which has looked into the options for the future of the Civil Service Catering Organisation.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* Following an assessment of prospects for the Civil Service Catering Organisation—CISCO—in a study announced on 4 April 1990, *Official Report*, columns *608-09*, I have decided that CISCO should be reorganised with the aim of its transfer to the private sector.

Reorganisation will include developing CISCO's operations on more commercial lines and concentrating them upon its business activities. It will be for individual Departments and agencies to decide what catering facilities will be made available to staff. In consequence, certain administration-related work which CISCO has undertaken hitherto will pass elsewhere within government, some to Departments generally and some to the Treasury. The changes will give CISCO the opportunity to

improve the value for money which its services offer both to its Government Department clients and to the individual customers of the staff restaurants which it runs and manages. Competitive tendering of catering contracts will continue, and the free choices made by CISCO's clients and customers will eventually determine whether it will be viable for operation in the private sector or whether the needs of Departments and individual customers will best be met by other catering contractors. I expect the management of this process of change to finish by the end of March 1993.

Consultations will take place with the Council of Civil Service Unions and the Joint Co-ordinating Committee for Government Industrial Establishments.

Community Charge

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *624*, if he will estimate the increase in the standard rate of income tax which would be required to yield the same revenue as his revised estimate of the yield of the community charge in 1991-92, following his Budget announcement on measures to reduce the amounts raised in community charge.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* Around 4p.

Inflation

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the fall in inflation between 1979 and 1990 *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the G7 as a whole, calculating United Kingdom inflation in terms of the underlying rate in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* There are a number of ways of estimating underlying inflation. As measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments and the community charge rates the 12-month rate fell from 12·5 per cent. in 1979 to 7·2 per cent. in 1990. Alternatively as measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments the rate fell from 12·5 per cent. in 1979 to 8·1 per cent. in 1990.

The average 12-month increase in consumer prices for G7 countries in 1990 was 5 per cent. A comparable figure for 1979 is not available.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Reading

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of books included in the recommended reading lists for children in level 3 which are presently in print.

Mr. Eggar: Of the 24 titles on the booklist for the level 3 reading test, 10 are currently in print, four more will be in print by the end of this week and the remaining 10 will be reprinted over the next few weeks. The titles were chosen on the assumption that every school would have at least one in stock. There is no need for schools to obtain a copy of every title on the list in order to carry out the reading tests.

National Association of Boys' Clubs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the cost of HM inspectors' inspection of the National Association of Boys' Clubs carried out between September 1988 and June 1989.

Mr. Atkins: The approximate direct cost of the inspection was £15,000.

National Curriculum

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to promote the discussion of environmental problems, within the geography national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend laid earlier this week the order that contains the attainment targets and programmes of study for geography in the national curriculum. This includes a whole attainment target dealing with environmental geography. Environmental education is also a cross-curricular theme within the national curriculum and other subjects, notably science, will have their part to play in delivering this aspect of education.

Mandatory Awards

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to amend the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1990 for the current academic year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend is laying before the House today the Education (Mandatory Awards) (Amendment) Regulations 1991. Subject to parliamentary approval, these will amend the regulations covering England and Wales for the current academic year in the following respects.

First, they will give effect to the arrangements for architecture students announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *145-46*. Following the redesignation of architecture courses, they will provide for a mandatory award this year to any eligible student who has not already received a bursary under the temporary scheme established last autumn.

Secondly, they will provide for fees-only or full mandatory awards as appropriate for certain students whose ordinary residence included periods spent in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic before unification. This is a technical change to put these students on the same footing as those whose residential qualifications were acquired elsewhere in EC territory.

Thirdly, the amendments will dispense with the allowance which has hitherto been payable, at discretion, to students who would otherwise suffer undue hardship during the vacation. This allowance is no longer needed, now that the resources available to students have been substantially increased, notably with the introduction of loans. Its removal will ease local education authorities' administration of awards. Students will still be eligible for the extra weeks study allowance if they are required to attend their courses during the vacation.

Finally, the amendments will correct some minor technical ambiguities in the provisions for termly payment

of fees, for certain exceptional entitlements to a mandatory award following previous award-supported study, and for the scope of the basic disabled student's allowance.

WALES

Children's Hospital, Ely

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the relative costs of procedures and operations at the children's ear, nose and throat hospital, Ely, Cardiff relative to the costs of other hospitals for similar *(a)* outpatient and *(b)* inpatient cases.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not held centrally.

Archaeological Explorations

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of instances in Wales whereby landowners have been required to incur the costs of archaeological explorations and/or excavations; and if he will indicate the total cost of such work.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There is no specific statutory provision to require landowners to meet the costs of archaeological explorations and/or excavations. However, the treatment of archaeological remains can be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and local planning authorities can impose appropriate conditions to protect monuments or ensure access for archaeologists. In addition voluntary agreements can also be made under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to provide for archaeological works. Such local arrangements are matters for the interested parties and are notified to the Department.

Sheep Farming

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with Welsh farmers about the future of the sheep industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The sheep industry is a regular subject of discussion in the frequent meetings I have with farmers and their representatives. The Government continue to support the industry and last year took full advantage of the European Commission's decision to bring forward the two advance payments of sheep annual premium. In 1991, sheep producers in the LFA will benefit from substantial increases in the rate of HLCA payments, and a supplement of 4 ecu to the sheep annual premium, which together will increase the support payments to producers in Wales by some £18 million.

Knacker Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in Wales on the knacker industry; and what representations he has received.

Mr. David Hunt: I am aware of the concerns of the knacker industry. It is central to our waste disposal practice and for many years has provided a vital service. A Community directive agreed last November lays down harmonised rules about the disposal of animal waste. We have secured, against the opposition of other member states, provision for the knacker trade to continue in its present form at least until 1995 and then the possibility of continuation after that date.

Local Government

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he intends to publish concerning his proposals for unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have made no proposals for unitary authorities and the question of guidelines does not arise. I have received some representations that we should move towards such a system, but I do not intend to make any decisions until I have had the benefit of further discussions with the Welsh local authority associations.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of community and town councils.

Mr. David Hunt: Community and town councils play an important role in many parts of Wales. In considering the merits of any proposals put to me for reorganisation of Welsh local government, I intend to take careful account of their implications for the continued effective operation of these councils.

Historic Monuments Agency

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the performance targets he is setting for 1991-92 in relation to the establishment of CADW: the Welsh Historic Monuments executive agency.

Sir Wyn Roberts: CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments will formally become an executive agency under the "next steps" initiative on 1 April this year. It is responsible for the discharge of the Secretary of State's statutory functions relating to the preservation, protection and maintenance of ancient monuments, historic buildings and conservation areas within Wales.

The chief executive will be personally responsible for achieving improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and in customer services. To enable him to exercise that responsibility, my right hon. Friend has made delegations of authority to him, which are set out in the agency's framework document, which defines the respective roles and responsibilities of the agency chief executive, the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State for Wales. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Each year we shall be setting demanding financial and service targets for CADW. The targets set for its first year of operation as an agency, financial year 1991-92, are as follows:

A. *Conservation/preservation*

(i) Completion to time and within cost of 85 per cent. of priority conservation projects identified in the quinquennial review of properties in care.

(ii) Notification to applicants of decisions on Historic Buildings Council grant applications within 18 weeks of receipt in 85 per cent. of cases.

(iii) Determination of 75 per cent. of scheduled monument consent cases within 90 days.

(iv) Determination of 75 per cent. of listed building consent referrals in 28 days; 90 per cent. within 60 days.
(v) Complete 12 historic building listing re-surveys in the year, where each re-survey covers one or more community districts.
(vi) Decide on 30 ancient monuments within the scheduling enhancement programme in the year. This programme is rationalising the existing schedule of ancient monuments and identifying representative samples of different monument classes for scheduling.

B. *Presentation*
(vii) Generate increase in receipts to £2·76 million from the 1990-91 forecast outturn of £2·4 million.
(viii) Maintain overall market share of the top 20 heritage sites in Wales at 66·6 per cent., which represents about 1·4 million visitors to CADW sites.

C. *Administration*
(ix) Operate within allocated programme and running cost budgets.
(x) Generate a 1·5 per cent. efficiency improvement against gross running costs covering all of the agency's operations.

Performance against these targets will be assessed in the agency's annual report which we will lay before the House as soon as possible after the year end.

CADW remains part of the Welsh Office, and my right hon. Friend will remain accountable to this House for CADW. Where hon. or right hon. Members have queries about matters relating to the operations of CADW I hope that they will write in the first instance to the chief executive at Brunel house, 2 Fitzalan road, Cardiff CF2 1UY. If Members remain dissatisfied after receiving a reply from CADW they will be able to raise the issue with my right hon. Friend. We will, of course, continue to deal with questions of policy and the provision of resources.

The Secretary of State approved the appointment of Mr. John Carr, the current director of CADW, as the chief executive of the agency for the next three years. We wish the chief executive and his staff every success for the future. I am confident that the enhanced responsibilities which they have will enable them to meet their objectives in respect of the built heritage of Wales while giving better value for money.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to establish a regional assembly for Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The local authorities association and others have pressed upon me the case for such an assembly to perform executive functions in the Principality. I have not reached a final decision on this question, but I have to say that the suggestions that have been put to me pose very considerable problems, not least because of the uncertainties and ambiguities about the respective responsibilities of the Secretary of State and of the assembly and about the powers of the assembly. I am not at present persuaded that the creation of an assembly along these lines would be in the best interests of the people of Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in his review of the structure and function of local councils in Wales what consideration he has given to the likely cost of establishing a Welsh assembly.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* The proposals for an assembly which have been put to me are not sufficiently precise to allow for an accurate costing, but the costs would certainly be considerable. Estimates made in the White Paper "Our Changing Democracy"—Cm 6348, 1975—increased to allow for inflation, suggest that the annual running costs of an assembly could be between £40 million and £50 million. The "Vote No" lobby issued a booklet in February 1979 which put the cumulative costs of an assembly over a 21-year period. That total, increased for inflation, would now be £1 billion.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the Ethiopian Government concerning the cutting off of the joint relief partnership supply route from Assab port to famine areas of northern Ethiopia since 17 March.

Mrs. Chalker: We made representations with the donor group in Addis Ababa on 22 March. On 25 March the Ethiopian Government announced that the southern line would reopen. We understand that convoys began moving again on 26 March, when 40 trucks left Dessie to travel north.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total amount of United Kingdom aid for cross-border relief into Tigray and Eritrea given since September 1990 to date; and what plans he has to give further assistance for cross-border operations.

Mrs. Chalker: About £6·3 million. We shall continue to provide humanitarian relief aid to Eritrea and Tigray using the most effective means available, including cross-border where appropriate.

Thailand

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to reduce or cut off bilateral aid to Thailand following the recent military coup.

Mrs. Chalker: We are following political developments closely and will take them into account in reaching decisions on new aid activities.

TRANSPORT

Road Building

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the (i) areas of outstanding natural beauty and (ii) sites of special scientific interest which lie within the path of currently proposed routes for his Department's road building programme.

Mr. Chope: All trunk road schemes are designed to avoid unnecessary adverse impact on the environment and to maximise the environmental gains which result from new roads. Wherever possible roads are kept away from protected areas such as areas of outstanding natural

beauty and sites of special scientific interest, and when there is a risk that a proposed scheme will affect such an area it is examined with particular care to establish that a new road is needed and that the route has been chosen to do as little damage to the environment as practicable. The Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission are consulted from the earliest stages of route proposals, and measures to mitigate impact or to recreate habitats are agreed with them.

Areas of outstanding natural beauty now cover more than 13 per cent. of the land area of England and Wales and existing trunk roads already run through many of them. Improvements to those routes may affect 12 of the 38 areas of outstanding natural beauty. They are:

Chilterns
Cotswolds
Cornwall
Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs
Dorset
Kent Downs
High Weald
East Hampshire
North Downs
North Wessex Downs
Surrey Hills
Sussex Downs

More than 5,300 sites of special scientific interest cover about 7 per cent. of the land area of Great Britain. Currently proposed routes for road improvements have some impact on 27 sites of special scientific interest—0·5 per cent. of the total:

Bingley South Bog
Boilton Wood
Chasewater Heath
Clints Hill
Coombe Haven (corridor for road reserved at designation)
Duddon Sands
Eashing Copse
Fleam Dyke/Roman Road
Folkestone and Etchinghill Escarpment
Folkestone Warren
Goss Moor
Hampton Rock Cutting
Hilton Gravel Pits
Hindhead Common
Hook Moor (road verge designated as SSSI)
Hurcott and Podmore Pools
New Forest
Oxleas Wood
Rainham Marshes
River Wye
Roughdown Common
St. Catherine's Hill
Snelsmore Common
Swale
The Roughs
Winchester Meadows
Woolston Eyes

When construction of the A595 Egremont bypass is complete, it is proposed to designate a rocky outcrop exposed by the roadworks as an SSSI. There are other examples of road construction itself leading to the creation of scientifically valuable habitats.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on requirements for major maintenance on motorways and other trunk roads.

Mr. Chope: The Department has made good progress towards eliminating by 1992-93 the backlog of maintenance identified in the early 1980s. In the current financial year, renewal achieved has exceeded our target by some 10 per cent. and I expect the target again to be exceeded in the forthcoming financial year.

Traffic growth, particularly in recent years, has greatly exceeded that forecast when much of the present network was built. Over the last six years extensive data on network conditions have been collected and these have now been analysed to provide comprehensive information on future maintenance needs. Results indicate that an effective programme of maintenance will require a level of activity significantly above 1991-92 level.

The information from this work will be updated annually so that progress can be monitored and requirements reviewed.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much it will cost his Department to assess competing bids for transport supplementary grant for highway structural maintenance on the primary route network.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 25 March 1991]*: The assessment of competing bids for TSG will not necessitate any increase in departmental staff.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Leisure Centres

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list by district council the leisure centres operated by each local government authority in Northern Ireland;

(2) if he will list the community centres operated by district councils in Northern Ireland, stipulating the responsible council in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

District Council Leisure and Community Centres

ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Antrim Forum

Community Centres
1. Neillsbrook
2. Crumlin
3. Rathenraw
4. Muckamore
5. Stiles
6. Greystone
7. Parkhall

ARDS BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Ards Leisure Centre
2. Comber Leisure Centre
3. Kiltonga Squash Centre
4. NI Aquarium

Community Centres
1. Queen's Hall
2. Glen
3. Manor Court
4. West Winds
5. Donaghadee
6. Ballywalter Village Hall
7. Ballygowan Village Hall
8. Portaferry Market House
9. Town Hall, Arts Centre, Newtownards.

ARMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Orchard Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. Armagh
2. Keady
3. Richhill Recreation Park (Pavilion)

BALLYMENA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Seven Towers Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. Ahoghill
2. Ballee
3. Ballykeel
4. Broughshane
5. Cullybackey
6. Dunclug
7. Galgorm
8. Harryville
9. Portglenone
10. Sentry Hill
11. Waveney

BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Riada Centre

Community Centres
1. Ballybogey Hall
2. Carnanney Tenants Association
3. Cloughmills Village Association
4. Dervock and District Community Association

BANBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Downshire Leisure Centre/Swimming Pool

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Andersonstown Leisure Centre
2. Avoniel Leisure Centre
3. Shankill Leisure Centre
4. Maysfield Leisure Centre
5. The Grove Leisure Centre
6. Beechmount Leisure Centre
7. Ballysillan Leisure Centre
8. Olympia Leisure Centre
9. Whiterock Leisure Centre
10. Shaftesbury Recreation Centre
11. Ballymacarratt Recreation Centre
12. Ormeau Park
13. Falls Swimming Centre
14. Grosvenor Recreation Centre
15. Loughside Recreation Centre

Community Centres
1. Ardoyne
2. Concord
3. Dee Street
4. Divis
5. Duncairn
6. Finaghy
7. Glen Road
8. Hammer Community Complex
9. Highfield
10. Horn Drive
11. Knocknagoney
12. Ligoniel
13. Markets
14. Morton
15. North Queen Street
16. Olympia
17. Suffolk
18. Sandy Row
19. Trinity Street
20. Whiterock
21. Woodvale

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Carrickfergus Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. Woodburn
2. Sunnyland
3. Greenisland
4. Whitesand
5. Castlemara

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Dundonald International Ice Bowl
2. Robinson Centre
3. Ballybeen Community/Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. Bolvoir
2. Braniel
3. Dungoyne
4. Tullycarnet
5. Cregagh
6. Castlereagh

COLERAINE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Coleraine Leisure Centre
2. Waterworld Complex

Community Centres
1. Millburn
2. Harpers Hill
3. Ballysally

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Cookstown Recreation Centre

CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Craigavon Leisure Centre
2. Cascades
3. Lurgan Swimming Complex

Community Centres
1. Ashgrove Road
2. Avenue Road
3. Brownstown Park
4. Corcrain
5. Drumgor
6. Killicomaine
7. Monbrief
8. Mourneview
9. Moyraverty
10. North Lurgan
11. Pinebank House (Arts and Resource)
12. Lurgan Town Hall (Arts and Resource)
13. Portadown Town Hall (Arts and Resource)
14. Harford Street Hall

DERRY CITY COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Templemore Sports Complex
2. Lisnagelvin Leisure Centre
3. Brooke Parke
4. Brandywell

Community Centres
1. Shantallow
2. Gobnascale
3. Foyle Hill
4. Glenview
5. Lisnagelvin
6. Creggan
7. Lincoln Courts
8. Carn Hill
9. Clooney
10. Rosemont

11. Gaol Turret
12. Pilot's Row

DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Down Leisure Centre
2. Newcastle Leisure Centre
3. Ballynahinch Recreation Centre

Community Centres
1. Killough Road
2. The Dan Rice Memorial Hall
3. Down Arts Centre

DUNGANNON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Swimming Pool, Circular Road

Community Centres
1. Public Service Building 'The Moy'
2. Resource Centre

FERMANAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Lakeland Forum
2. Castle Park Centre
3. Bawnacre Centre

Community Centres
1. Belcoo
2. Belleek
3. Ederney
4. Kesh
5. Newtownbutler
6. Roslea

LARNE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Tower Pools Complex

Community Centres
1. Ballycarry
2. Glynn Village Hall
3. Greenisland
4. Islandmagee
5. Kilwaughter Village Hall
6. Lynn
7. McGarel Town Hall
8. Millbrook
9. Seacourt

LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Roe Valley Recreation Centre
2. Dungiven Recreation Centre

Community Centres
1. Dromore
2. Limavady
3. Feeny
4. Aghanloo
5. Benone

LISBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Lisburn Leisure Centre
2. Lisburn Swimming Pool
3. Grove Activity Centre
4. Kilmakee Activity Centre
5. Glenmore Activity Centre
6. Brook Activity Centre

Community Centres
1. West Lisburn
2. Bridge

MAGHERAFELT DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Greenvale Leisure Centre
2. Maghera Recreation Centre

Community Centres
1. Draperstown Town Hall

MOYLE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Sheskburn House Recreation Centre

Community Centres
1. Bushmills
2. Mosside
3. Causeway Centre

NEWRY & MOURNE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Newry Sports Centre
2. Newry Swimming Pool
3. Kilkeel Sports Centre

Community Centres
1. Cloughreagh
2. Loanda House
3. Dromalane
4. Meadow/Armagh Road
5. Cabra
6. Meigh
7. Cullyhanna
8. Burren
9. Barnmeen
10. Mullaghbawn
11. Dromintee
12. Forkhill
13. Crossmaglen
14. Whitecross
15. Lisnacree
16. Longstone
17. Saval
18. Lislea
19. Annalong
20. Camlough
21. Newtownhamilton
22. Ballyholland
23. Threeways
24. Bessbrook
25. Kingdom
26. O'Neill Avenue
27. Warrenpoint Town Hall
28. Newry Town Hall

NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. The Valley
2. Ballyearl

Community Centres
1. Rathfern
2. Rushpark
3. Ballyduff
4. Monkstown

NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Leisure Centre
1. Bangor Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. Skipperstone
2. Kilcooley
3. Breezemount
4. Conlig
5. Redburn
6. Birdland Drop In
7. Queen's Hall

OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Omagh Leisure Centre

Community Centres
1. CKS
2. Cloughfin
3. Creggan
4. Drumquin
5. Eskra

6. Fintona
7. Gardenville
8. Gortin Village
9. Greencastle
10. Hospital Road
11. Hunter Crescent
12. Lisanelly Heights
13. Loughmacrory
14. Mountfield
15. Mullaghmore/Castleview
16. Omagh CDT
17. Owenkillew
18. Strathroy
19. Termonmaquirc
20. Trillick
21. Drumduff/Drumnakilly

STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Leisure Centres
1. Riversdale
2. Derg Valley

Community Centres
1. Melvin Hall
2. Fountain Street
3. Clady Hall

Tank and Bottled Gas

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up an inquiry into the price of tank and bottled gas in the Province.

Mr. Needham: The Director General of the Office of Fair Trading is already making inquiries into the operation of the liquefied petroleum gas market throughout the United Kingdom. I have alerted him to the impact recent price increases are having in Northern Ireland and the director general has undertaken to let me know the outcome of his inquiries.

Civil Service

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his Department last conducted a survey of the ethnic origins of its employees; when it next plans to do so; and whether he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave him on 12 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *466-67*.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of officers in each of grades 1 to 7 and overall in his Department are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic minorities, respectively.

Dr. Mawhinney: I would refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave him on 12 March 1991, *Official Report*, column *467*.

Dunover Road, Ballywalter

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to improve the roadway, known as Dunover road, Ballywalter, between Broadway and The Manse beyond the 30mph sign; whether a footway will be provided along this stretch of road; what information he has on the number of schoolchildren walking along this roadway; and whether any work will commence at this location in the current year.

Mr. Needham: A scheme to realign a section of Dunover road between Broadway and the existing length of footway has started; it will include the provision of a footway. There are no proposals for improving the remainder of Dunover road at present.

No information is available on the number of schoolchildren who walk along the road in question.

Boyd House, Ards Hospital

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many residents there are in Boyd house at Ards hospital; whether new residents are still being accepted; and if he will make a statement about the future of Boyd house.

Mr. Hanley: There are 43 residents in Boyd house, a 52-place unit for the elderly. There is no waiting list for admission and new residents are still being accepted. The organisation of services at local level is a matter for health and social services boards. I am not aware of any proposals by the Eastern board relating to the future of Boyd house.

Police Complaints Commission

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for copies of the report of the triennial review by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland to be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The report has been laid today. It reviews the working of articles 4 to 16 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 during the period 1988 to 1991.

This is the first such report from the commission, which was established in 1988. I am glad to note that in general terms it is satisfied with the statutory procedures in the order for the handling of complaints from the public against individual police officers. However, it has made nine recommendations which it considers will further enhance these procedures and, before reaching any decision on them, I intend consulting the various interested bodies. I shall report to the House further in due course.

I am grateful to the commission for the considerable effort that has been put into the preparation of the report. It has now had three years' experience of the system for handling complaints and it is only right and proper that its views backed by operational experience should be the basis for a re-examination of the procedures. The commission, by its fair and thorough handling of individual complaints, has already done much to improve the relationship between the police and the public it serves. Its triennial review is further evidence that it is concerned to ensure that the complaints system operates efficiently, effectively and impartially for all the parties involved and, most importantly, that it is seen to do so.

Rate Collection Agency

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in establishing the Rate Collection Agency.

Mr. Needham: I am pleased to announce that the Rate Collection Agency will be established as an executive agency of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland with effect from 1 April 1991. It is responsible for the collection of rates and administration

of the housing benefit scheme for owner-occupiers. I am confident that the new status as a "next steps" agency will lead to a significant and sustained improvement in the delivery of this important public service. I am delegating full managerial authority for the agency's day-to-day operations to the chief executive. The policy and resources framework for the agency is set out in the framework document, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House. For 1991-92, the following targets have been set for the agency:

(i) To reduce debt to below 2 per cent. of the gross collectable rate, excluding late assessments, by 31 March 1992.
(ii) To achieve a reduction of 1·6 per cent. in the real value of the unit costs of collecting rates per hereditament.
(iii) To generate refunds to 90 per cent. of ratepayers so entitled within 14 days of credits being identified.
(iv) To process by 31 March 1992, 75 per cent. of applications in respect of the incoming year received from existing housing benefit recipients before 16 March 1992.
(v) To achieve a 1·5 per cent. reduction in the real value of the unit costs of processing housing benefit applications.
(vi) To achieve 96 per cent. of housing benefit assessments free of error.

The Rate Collection Agency has also to achieve running costs cash efficiency savings of at least 1·5 per cent. in addition to projected non-cash efficiency savings.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 43rd session of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Prime Minister: The 43rd session of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 22 April 1991. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the session will consist of 11 Members of the Conservative party, six Members of the Labour party and one Member of the Liberal Democrat party. I have also appointed a number of substitute delegates.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the leaders of those parties concerned.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the assembly of the Western European Union, which next meets in Paris on 3 June.

Representatives from the Government Benches will be:

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg)—who will act as leader of both delegations.

My hon. Friends the Members for:
Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith)
Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson)
Twickenham (Mr. Jessel)
Northampton, South (Mr. Morris)
Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes)
Poole (Mr. Ward)
Ashford (Mr Speed)
Streatham (Sir W. Shelton)
Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and
The Earl of Kinnoull

Representatives from the Labour party will be:

The hon. Members for:
Newport, East (Mr. Hughes)
Wallsend (Mr. Garrett)
Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)
Tooting (Mr Cox)
Liverpool, Riverside (Mr Parry)
Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing)

Representatives from the Liberal Democrats party will be:

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates.

From the Government benches:

My hon. Friends the Members for:
Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson)
Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe)
Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell)
Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)
Lewes (Mr. Rathbone)
Brighton, Kempton (Mr. Bowden)
Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord)
Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt)
Lord Newall and Lord Rodney

From the Labour party:

The hon. Members for:
Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson)
Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland)
Don Valley (Mr. Redmond)
Warley, East (Mr. Faulds)
Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)
Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie)
and Lord Kirkhill

From the Liberal Democrats party:

The Lord Mackie of Benshie

Former Prime Ministers

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has any plans to assist former Prime Ministers with their office and secretarial expenses.

The Prime Minister: I propose to establish, with effect from 1 April 1991, a financial allowance to help former Prime Ministers to meet the continuing additional office costs which they are liable to incur because of their special position in public life. The new allowance, which will be equivalent in amount to the parliamentary office costs allowance, will be payable in respect of office and secretarial expenses incurred in connection with their public duties. It will be paid from the Cabinet Office vote. The allowance will not be payable to a former Prime Minister occupying the position of Leader of the Opposition and therefore in receipt of "Short" money.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yugoslavia

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the Yugoslav Government regarding recent violence against the Albanian minority in Kosova; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our western partners are continuing to urge the Serbian authorities to ensure the human and political rights of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Albania

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent proposals have been received by Her Majesty's Government from the Government of Albania regarding the restoration of full and formal diplomatic relations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British and Albanian officials met in November and December of last year to discuss outstanding bilateral issues, including the possible resumption of diplomatic relations. We have not since then received any further proposals from the Albanians.

Nuclear Tests

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response the United Kingdom delegates to the amendment conference for the partial nuclear test ban treaty in January made to the criticisms of United Kingdom policy of continued nuclear warhead testing put forward by the Mauritius, Brazilian and Pakistan delegations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The head of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference made clear our position: because our security will depend for the foreseeable future on deterrence based in part on the possession of nuclear weapons, we have continuing need to test our nuclear weapons to ensure that they remain effective and up to date.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response was made by the United Kingdom delegation to the amendment conference for the partial nuclear test ban treaty held in January, to the proposals submitted in draft for a verification protocol II to the partial nuclear test ban treaty to assist in the completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We made it clear at the conference that we do not believe that a comprehensive test ban could be properly verified. We believe that the conference on disarmament at Geneva provides the most appropriate forum for discussion of progress on nuclear testing issues.

Thailand

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the Thai authorities to encourage a restoration of democracy and an end to repression.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made clear, both to the National Peace Keeping Committee and the interim civilian Government, our great regret at the removal of a democratically elected civilian Government and the imposition of martial law; and our hope for the swift restoration of democracy.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Middle East

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences he has granted for the sale of conventional or non-conventional weapons to middle eastern states since the ending of the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the period from 1 to 20 March 1991, 50 export licences have been granted for the supply of conventional weapons to the following middle eastern countries:
UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen.
There were no export licences for non-conventional weapons.

Cosmetics (Animal Testing)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to end the testing of cosmetic products on animals: and what assessment he has made of the effect which the completion of the single market will have on such experimentation in Britain.

Mr. Leigh: No. The law requires cosmetic products to be safe for use by the public, and in some cases the only way of ensuring this is to test them on animals. We are, however, seeking to keep to the essential minimum the increased testing proposed by the European Commission.

Baghdad Arms Exhibition

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what grounds BAe was given an export licence to exhibit a jet trainer aircraft at the Baghdad arms exhibition in 1989.

Mr. Sainsbury: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on individual export licence cases.

Applications for export licences are considered on their merits. Licences for international exhibitions normally require the goods to remain under the control of the exporter and to be returned to the United Kingdom within a specified period.

Trade Descriptions Act

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will complete his review of the Trade Descriptions Act.

Mr. Leigh: Consideration of the responses to the consultation document issued as part of the review is continuing and I shall announce my conclusions as soon as possible.

Timeshare

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received during 1991 from companies selling and marketing timeshare properties.

Mr. Leigh: I have received one such representation.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to discuss in the European Council of Ministers the marketing of timeshare properties.

Mr. Leigh: It is for the presidency to arrange the timing and agenda of meetings of the Council of Ministers. No meeting of the Consumer Council has yet been arranged by the current presidency.

Inward Investment, London

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list of the figures for inward investment projects involving international firms for the London boroughs of Barnet, Enfield and Haringey, and for the constituencies of Tottenham, Hornsey and Wood Green, Edmonton, Enfield, North and Enfield, Southgate, for each year since 1979 in terms of the number of projects, new jobs and safeguarded jobs.

Mr. Leigh: I regret that the information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Engineers (Line Tapping)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will discuss with the chairman of British Telecom and the Director General of the Office of Telecommunications what evidence there is of telephone engineers tapping into private subscribers' lines to make 898 and other premium-rate or long-distance calls; and what steps are being taken to prevent this from occurring.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend has no plans for such a discussion. This is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications, Sir Bryan Carsberg. I understand that he has instructed his staff to conduct a thorough and wide-ranging review of all premium-rate disputes. The investigation of allegations that telephone engineers have been tapping into private subscribers' lines to make illicit calls will form part of that review.

South Africa

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on how British companies have complied with the European Community code of conduct for companies with interests in South Africa during the 12-month period to 30 June 1990.

Mr. Lilley: By 15 March 1991, 107 companies had submitted reports to the DTI under the code of conduct. Copies of the reports and of the Department's analysis and summary have, as in previous years, been placed in the Library of each House. These documents may also be inspected at the Department's export market information centre, at the British embassy in Pretoria, at the British consulate-general in Johannesburg, and at the British consulates in Cape Town and Durban.

The analysis and summary is the fifth since the adoption of the revised code of conduct by EC Foreign Ministers in November 1985. Reports were received from all British companies, except one, whose interests are known or believed to warrant a full report under the code. The company which did not report was reminded of the existence of the code.

The reporting period under review has seen a marginal increase in the number of black employees of British subsidiaries being paid below the code's recommended minimum level. This increase is due to one company having acquired two new subsidiaries during the reporting period. This particular company intends to raise the wage levels in these two subsidiaries to at least the code's minimum level.

Companies' reports indicated that the level of their involvement with trade unions representing black workers increased, with the majority of companies reporting formal involvement with the trade unions. Many companies have taken steps to alleviate the particular hardships experienced by their migrant workers.

The number of companies providing training schemes has continued to increase, and as in previous years, all companies provided "on-the-job" training. In addition, companies continued to report impressive levels of involvement in projects benefiting not only their employees and their families but the wider communities from which their work force were drawn. Companies also continued to encourage the growth of black business.

The report reflects the increasing level of unemployment in South Africa, with a number of companies reporting a contraction of their black work force. This disturbing trend has continued since the period covered by the report: the South African Chamber of Business now estimates that over 40 per cent. of the economically active population are unemployed. This illustrates the pressing need to restore growth to the South African economy.

The Government are once more grateful to companies for their continued co-operation in providing reports and urge them to maintain this performance and to comply fully with the code.

Professional Qualifications

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will lay regulations to implement EC directive 89/48/EEC on the recognition of professional qualifications.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have today laid in Parliament the European Communities (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 1991 under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. These regulations would implement into United Kingdom law Council directive 89/48/EEC on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration.

The directive represents a significant improvement in the opportunities that will be available to members of the professions throughout the Community. It will enable a professional to use his home state professional qualification to obtain access to the equivalent profession in other member states. He will not have to have to undergo the education and training required for the profession in the other member states. The directive will also benefit consumers who will gain from improved competition in professional services.

The United Kingdom would be only the second member state, after Ireland, to have implemented the directive in full. I am anxious that consumers in the United Kingdom should enjoy the benefits of improved competition in the provision of professional services as soon as possible. This action maintains the excellent record of the United Kingdom on the implementation of Community directives.

I will also be encouraging other member states to fulfil their Community obligations without delay so that United Kingdom professionals are able to take full advantage of the system of mutual recognition established by the directive.

Tied Pubs

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has considered representations for a deferment of the date by which national brewers have to release pubs from ties.

Mr. Lilley: Yes. I have considered carefully representations both for and against the deferment of the November 1992 date by which major brewers are required by the Beer Orders to release pubs from ties. I have concluded after weighing up all these representations that amending the orders in this way could not be justified. Brewers will have had three years in which to make their dispositions by November 1992. Deferring the date would be unfair to those national and regional brewers who have already taken steps to comply with or take advantage of the order and would prolong uncertainty for tenants.

The Beer Orders require brewers owning more than 2,000 pubs to free up from tie half they own in excess of 2,000 by 1 November 1992. There are at least four ways in which a brewer can free up a pub from tie: the pub can be leased to the sitting tenant free of any ties; sold to the sitting tenant; sold with sitting tenant to a third party; and sold with vacant possession. Only the last of these four options would involve the eviction of the tenant.

I am naturally concerned about statements by certain brewers that they will issue "notices to quit" to large numbers of their tenants, even though the number issued is likely to be much lower than the figures that have been mentioned in the press. I understand that most of these notices will be issued by two national brewers in order to renegotiate the terms of their tenancy agreements and will not ultimately lead to evictions. I have urged the brewers concerned to keep the number of notices they send out to an absolute minimum and to make their purpose clear to tenants.

Deferring the November 1992 date in the Beer Orders would not affect the date by which the brewers would have to send out "notices to quit" since this is determined by the fact that all tenancy agreements will be protected by the Landlord and Tenant Act by July 1992. It has been put to me that there would be no need to issue "notices to quit" if the date in the Beer Orders was deferred since this would allow pubs to be sold as they become available through natural wastage. However, brewers will have had three years by November 1992 in which to take action to comply with the order. This already represents a year more than was originally recommended by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its report on the supply of beer. Four of the six major brewers have either already taken or announced steps to comply with the order by November 1992. It is not clear why these should be disadvantaged because the other two have been slower in taking action.

Several national brewers who have already taken steps to comply with the orders have made it clear they do not wish to see any deferment of the November 1992 date. A large number of the regional brewers have expressed strong opposition to any change in the date as they are keen to strengthen their brewing base by acquiring further premises and selling to more "free outlets". They regard the present orders as a balance between the interests of brewers of different sizes which would be upset if there was a change in the date. A number have suggested that deferring the date in the order might lead to further regional brewers withdrawing altogether from brewing. Tenants' representatives have also generally made it clear that deferring the date would be unwelcome as it would prolong uncertainty for their members.

I recognise that the changes taking place are unsettling for many in the industry. But they also offer opportunities —to tenants to manage their own businesses and to brewers to compete in a larger free trade market. I believe that it would be wrong to change the timing now, given the way many national and regional brewers have already responded to the orders and given the further uncertainty that would be created for pub tenants if the implementation date were delayed.

Beer

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reasons for non-implementation of section 43 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 as it affects the head on a measure of beer.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* I have no plans to implement section 43 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 because there is little evidence that individual consumers are dissatisfied with how beer is served.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 March to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), if he will give the full corporate headquarters address of NCM, list its shareholders and their percentage shareholding, and give a brief summary of its experience in the field of export credit quarantee, insurance and reinsurance in *(a)* the Netherlands, *(b)* Benelux, *(c)* other EC member states and *(d)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and what links it has or has had with any state-backed export credit quarantee schemes in the Netherlands.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 March 1991]:* The full name and address of NCM is as follows:

Nederlandsche Credietverzekering Maatschappij N.V.
Keizeresgracht 271-287
1016 ED Amsterdam
Netherlands

NCM is Holland's largest credit risk insurance company. It was established in 1925 and its shareholders are 31 European banks, insurance companies and reinsurers. Details of NCM's shareholders and its activities can be obtained from NCM's annual report. I am arranging for the latest copy of this to be made available in the Library of the House. More detailed information on NCM, acquired by ECGD in the process of selling its short-term business, has been provided on a strict commercial in confidence basis and cannot, therefore, be disclosed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 March to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), if he will give the full company headquarters address of Assicurazioni Generali and a summary of its experience in export credit insurance in *(a)* Italy, *(b)* other EC member states and *(c)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and if he will

list its links with state-backed export credit insurance, guarantee or reinsurance schemes provided by the Italian Government.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 March 1991]:* The full name and address of Assicurazioni Generali is as follows:

Assicurazioni Generali S.p.A.
Piazza Duca Degli Abruzzi 2
34132 Trieste
Italy

Assicurazioni Generali is principally involved in the business of insurance and reinsurance. It has a large minority shareholding in SIAC, the Italian credit insurer. Details of Generali's activities can be obtained from its annual report. I am arranging for the latest copy of this to be made available in the Library of the House. More detailed information on Assicurazioni Generali, acquired by ECGD in the process of selling its short-term business, has been provided on a strict commercial in confidence basis and cannot, therefore, be disclosed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), *Official Report*, columns *88-89*, if he will provide the full address of the corporate headquarters of Cobac and a brief review of its experience in the field of export credit guarantee insurance or reinsurance in *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Benelux, *(c)* other EC member states and *(d)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and what links it has had and now has with any state-backed export credit guarantee schemes in Belgium.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 March 1991]:* The full name and address of COBAC is as follows:

Compagnie Belge d'Assurance Credit
Rue Montoyer, 15–
B–1040 Brussels
Belgium

COBAC is active in credit insurance and related business. Details of COBAC's activities can be obtained from its annual report. I am arranging for the latest copy of this to be made available in the Library of the House. More detailed information on COBAC, acquired by ECGD in the process of selling its short-term business, has been provided on a strict commercial in confidence basis and cannot therefore, be disclosed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), *Official Report*, columns *88-89*, if he will give the full corporate headquarters address of Gerling and its parent company, and a summary of its experience in the field of export credit insurance, reinsurance or guarantee in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* other EC countries and *(c)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and what links it has or has had with any state-backed export credit guarantee scheme in Germany.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 March 1991]:* The full name and address of Gerling is as follows:

Gerling–Konzern Speziale Kreditversicherungs–AG
Hohenzollernring 62
D-5000 Cologne 1
Germany

Gerling is the second largest German credit insurer. It provides domestic and export credit insurance. Details of Gerling's activities can be obtained from its annual report —English language versions are not available. I am arranging for the latest copy of this to be made available in the Library of the House. More detailed information on Gerling, acquired by ECGD in the process of selling its short term business, has been provided on a strict commercial in confidence basis and cannot, therefore, be disclosed.

Kuwait Oil Fires

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications he has had from Ventron Technology Ltd. of Reddish, Stockport, about equipment to extinguish Kuwait well fires; and what steps his Department has taken to meet representatives of Ventron and to put forward their ideas for dealing with the problem to the Kuwait Government.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* My Department received a fax message from Ventron Technology on 7 March. I received a letter on its behalf from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 14 March.

My officials have since spoken to Ventron Technology about its proposals, and the company has been recorded on my Department's database of companies interested in working in Kuwait.

British Shipbuilders

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), on 18 March, *Official Report*, column *20*, if he will make a statement concerning the details of the settlement of the outstanding claim made by Trafalgar House against British Shipbuilders.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* The settlement was in respect of an action brought by Trafalgar House for which British Shipbuilders have not admitted liability. The claim was for alleged losses of £191 million plus interest from 1984 due to alleged misrepresentations by British Shipbuilders following the privatisation of the Scott Lithgow yard.

The legal costs for each side were likely to run into tens of millions of pounds had the action come to court.

The £17 million cash settlement, plus the forgoing by British Shipbuilders of a counterclaim for £8 million from Trafalgar House, therefore represents a considerable potential saving for the public purse.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a table of expenditure showing the cost of running each regional office of his Department in 1989-90, excluding the funding programmes operated by the offices.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information is as follows:

	£ thousands
North East	3,412
North West	3,633
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,300

	£ thousands
East Midlands	1,598
West Midlands	2,951
South West	1,461
South East	2,663
East	391

Kuwait

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role his Department has taken in assisting British companies to secure contracts to rebuild Kuwait.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 20 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), at column *157*.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the impact of the poll tax on the demand for help and advice from citizens advice bureaux.

Mr. Leigh: Citizens advice bureaux have had to deal with a number of inquiries arising from the introduction of the community charge, just as they used to on rates. The number of inquiries on the community charge, rose in 1989-90 compared to 1988-89, but there was no significant change in the total number of inquiries dealt with by bureaux in 1989-90 compared to 1988-89. Figures relating to the current financial year are not yet available.

The Department of Environment has agreed to give the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux £36,000 this year to help with the costs of training bureaux workers to deal with these inquiries. The Scottish Office has also given Citizens Advice Scotland £36,000 over the last two years for the same purpose.

Smoked Salmon

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the duties placed on *(a)* fresh and *(b)* smoked salmon from (i) Norway and (ii) Canada, when imported into (1) EC countries and (2) the United States of America.

Mr. Sainsbury: The duty payable under the common customs tariff—CTT—on imports into EC countries of fresh salmon from Norway and Canada is 2 per cent. The CTT duty rate on imports into EC countries of smoked salmon from Norway and Canada is 13 per cent.

The duties payable on imports into the United States of America of smoked salmon from Norway and Canada are 5 and 2 per cent. respectively. All imports of fresh salmon into the United States of America are free of customs duty. However, as a result of a preliminary determination, fresh and chilled Atlantic salmon imported from Norway into the United States of America is currently subject to anti-dumping duties ranging from 15·65 to 31·81 per cent.

Germany (Trade Balance)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will initiate inquiries into the reason for the adverse trade balance with Germany.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have no plans to initiate inquiries. Last year our exports to Germany increased by 18·5 per cent. in value over 1989.

SCOTLAND

Historic Buildings Council

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the commercial relationships between Mr. Marc Ellington and Mr. Richard Emerson of the Historic Buildings Council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr. Marc Ellington is a member of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland, a statutory advisory body appointed by my right hon. Friend. Mr. Richard Emerson is not a member of the council; he is a principal inspector of historic buildings in Historic Buildings and Monuments, Scotland, which is part of the Scottish Environment Department. Mr. Ellington and Mr. Emerson have had no commercial dealings in any official capacity.

My right hon. Friend is aware that reference was made in a television programme broadcast on Channel 4 on 10 March to the purchase by Mr. Emerson from Mr. Ellington of a plot of land at Crovie in 1985. This was an entirely proper private transaction between two individuals. Their public duties did not overlap, and Mr. Emerson informed his senior officer of his intentions in 1985. Mr. Ellington and Mr. Emerson both retain the complete confidence of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will obtain for his Department's library a copy of the "Scottish Eye" programme on Channel 4, broadcast on 10 March.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Psychiatric Patients

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps his Department is taking to monitor and evaluate the continuing care of patients discharged from psychiatric hospital into the community, further to paragraph 1.29 of "Community Care into the Next Decade and Beyond";

(2) what steps he is taking to monitor and evaluate the continuing care of mentally ill people resident in the community.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 places a duty on local authorities and health boards jointly to prepare and publish, by 1 April 1992, in consultation with health boards, community care plans. We intend to monitor carefully the implementation of these plans, including the care of people with mental health problems discharged from psychiatric hospitals and resident in the community. The plans should define objectives and targets and include procedures for monitoring the achievement of effective community care.

Health boards will shortly be consulted on draft guidance on the introduction of care programmes for people with a mental illness. The main purpose of care programmes is to ensure that no person who has been treated for long-term mental illness is discharged from hospital without proper arrangements being made for his

or her continuing care in the community. It will be for health boards and local authorities to satisfy themselves that there are relevant community-based health and social work services to allow each discharged person to live satisfactorily in the community.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each health board *(a)* the number of patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals and *(b)* the number of readmissions to psychiatric hospitals, for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the table:

Mental illness hospitals and psychiatric units

Area of residence	*All discharges*	*Re-admissions*
1987		
Argyll and Clyde	2,569	1,533
Ayrshire and Arran	1,629	860
Borders	455	273
Dumfries and Galloway	1,075	840
Fife	1,796	1,028
Forth Valley	1,237	773
Grampian	2,453	1,549
Greater Glasgow	6,245	3,858
Highlands	1,203	800
Lanarkshire	2,437	1,388
Lothian	4,270	2,682
Orkney	36	12
Shetland	58	20
Tayside	2,208	1,309
Western Isles	78	41
Others	644	375
All Areas	28,393	17,341
1988		
Argyll and Clyde	2,711	1,596
Ayrshire and Arran	1,948	1,053
Borders	503	269
Dumfries and Galloway	1,020	826
Fife	1,819	992
Forth Valley	1,243	752
Grampian	2,481	1,430
Greater Glasgow	6,617	3,818
Highland	1,086	686
Lanarkshire	2,461	1,434
Lothian	4,357	2,812
Orkney	37	17
Shetland	42	25
Tayside	2,336	1,365
Western Isles	85	47
Others	661	392
All Areas	29,407	17,514
1989		
Argyll and Clyde	2,702	1,600
Ayrshire and Arran	2,083	1,159
Borders	492	337
Dumfries and Galloway	1,016	794
Fife	1,692	1,049
Forth Valley	1,262	811
Grampian	2,513	1,461
Greater Glasgow	6,461	3,879
Highland	954	632
Lanarkshire	2,372	1,398
Lothian	4,664	3,047
Orkney	38	17
Shetland	55	34
Tayside	2,367	1,425
Western Isles	97	52
Others	719	415
All Areas	29,487	18,110

Educational Visits

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy on educational visits for schoolchidren.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for education authorities.

Crime

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of *(a)* total crimes and *(b)* violent crimes in each police force area in Scotland in 1979 and 1990 or the most recently available date and the percentage increase, in each authority area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Number of crimes[1], crimes and offences[2] and violent crimes[3] recorded in police force areas in 1979 and 1989 and the percentage change.

Police Force Area	*1979*	*1989*	*Percentage change 1979-89*
Central			
Crimes	13,844	21,066	52
Crimes and offences	28,398	44,493	57
Violent crimes	1,271	3,006	137
Dumfries and Galloway			
Crimes	4,835	6,733	39
Crimes and offences	17,934	18,514	3
Violent crimes	404	1,037	157
Fife			
Crimes	14,257	27,690	94
Crimes and offences	31,779	53,411	68
Violent crimes	1,580	3,164	100
Grampian			
Crimes	22,821	34,034	49
Crimes and offences	50,604	76,538	51
Violent crimes	3,088	5,348	73
Lothian and Borders			
Crimes	62,502	78,301	25
Crimes and offences	116,828	141,039	21
Violent crimes	4,757	8,489	78
Northern			
Crimes	8,711	11,841	36
Crimes and offences	27,104	32,591	20
Violent crimes	1,231	1,896	54
Strathclyde			
Crimes	195,485	275,134	41
Crimes and offences	351,269	465,187	32
Violent crimes	16,625	31,018	87
Tayside			
Crimes	24,225	38,586	59
Crimes and offences	50,039	70,258	40
Violent crimes	1,767	3,574	102

Notes:

[1] Comprises groups 1-3 of the Scottish Office Home and Health Department (SOHHD) classification of crimes and offences.

[2] Comprises groups 1-7 of the SOHHD classification of crimes and offences.

[3] Comprises group 1 (non-sexual crimes of violence), the sexual assault category from group 2 (crimes of indecency) and the petty assault category from group 6 (miscellaneous offences) of the SOHHD classification of crimes and offences.

Details of the SOHHD classification are given in the SOHHD statistical bulletin "Recorded crime in Scotland, 1989", a copy of which is in the Library.

Homelessness

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will revise the code of guidance on homelessness legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We issued a revised draft of the code of guidance on the homelessness legislation for consultation in October 1990. A large number of responses were received; these have now been carefully considered and the revised code will be published soon.

Fisheries Enforcement

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his plans to establish the Scottish fisheries enforcement services as a "next steps" agency.

Mr. Lang: I informed the House on 28 February of my intention to establish the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency as an executive agency on 1 April 1991. My noble Friend will preside at a launch ceremony on 12 April.

For the 1991-92 financial year I have set the agency the following targets:

	Targets
Aerial surveillance—per cent. of hours flown on task	78 per cent.
Cost per aircraft sighting	£137
Marine surveillance—number of boardings at sea	2,750
Marine surveillance—cost per boarding	£2,263
Sea Fisheries Inspectorate—cost per £1 million of fish landed	£4,838
50 per cent. of cases for prosecution to be reported within 4 weeks of offence taking place and 90 per cent. within 6 weeks	
Number of cases where court proceedings are taken as percentage of offences reported for prosecution	75 per cent.

In order to ensure that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency uses its resources efficiently, I have set it a target to achieve cash-releasing efficiency gains of at least 1·5 per cent. and its running cost limit for 1991-92 has been set on that basis.

The agency chief executive will be directly accountable to me for the agency's achievements of these targets, which will be reported in the agency's published annual report.

I will place a copy of the agency's framework document in the Libraries of both Houses.

Historic Scotland

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his plans to establish Historic Scotland as an executive agency.

Mr. Lang: I informed the House on 28 February of my intention to establish Historic Scotland as an executive agency on 1 April. I can now confirm that the agency will indeed be set up on that date and that I shall preside at a launch ceremony on 8 April.

For 1991-92, the first year of operation, I have set the following key performance targets for Historic Scotland:

Number of monuments newly scheduled. The target is to schedule 280 monuments in 1991-92, in addition to the 4,800 already scheduled.

Number of completed units of the resurvey of listed buildings. The target is to complete 200 survey units in 1991-92.

Number of general historic building repair grant cases in payment. The target is to effect payment to 400 cases in 1991-92, giving priority to the most important buildings.

Number of visitors to monuments in care where an admission charge is made. The target is to increase visitor numbers by 4·5 per cent. to 2·71 million in 1991-92.

Total income. The target is to increase income to £6 million in 1991-92.

Conservation backlog on monuments in care. The target is to contain, and if possible to reduce, the backlog of overdue maintenance.

Value for money savings on maintenance of monuments in care. A target will be developed for 1992-93.

Surplus on commercial activities. A target will be developed for 1992-93.

Exchequer contribution to Historic Scotland's work. The target for 1991-92 is to keep the increase in the call on the Exchequer for net current expenditure at or below the level of inflation.

In order to ensure that Historic Scotland uses its domestic resources efficiently, I have set it a target to achieve cash-releasing efficiency gains of 1·5 per cent. and its running cost limit for 1991-92 has been set on that basis.

The director of Historic Scotland, as the agency's chief executive, will be directly accountable to me for the achievement of these targets, which will be reported in the agency's published annual report.

I will place a copy of the agency's framework document in the Libraries of both Houses.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he is making to publish the management statement for Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Enterprise management statement sets out the financial, managerial and operational framework within which Scottish Enterprise will operate.

I am arranging for copies to be laid in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Community Health

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the results of the research project "Community Health Promotion in a Deprived Area" funded by his Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* Copies of a report on a pilot project "Royston Wardieburn Community Health Project" and one on "Community Health Promotion in a Deprived Area" have been placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Single Parents

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what improvements Her Majesty's Government have introduced to help the single parent obtain maintenance payments.

Mr. Jack: The Government have taken a number of steps to help parents obtain maintenance for their

children. This Department has enhanced its action on recovery of maintenance for those claiming income support. For instance, we have improved our instructions on the interviewing of mothers who have never been married about the identity of the absent father. We have also introduced a number of measures that apply to all lone parents, whether divorced, separated or never married. We have strengthened the basis on which local social security offices assess absent parents' ability to pay maintenance. We have improved our ability to trace missing parents by reaching an agreement with the Inland Revenue to provide the address of an absent parent and the absent parent's employer. The Social Security Act 1990 gave the Department new powers to seek to include the costs of caring for children in orders obtained by the DSS for children, to transfer an order for a child obtained by the Department to a caring parent who leaves income support, and to enforce a caring parent's own private maintenance order. We have made clear the importance to be attached to this work in local offices and set targets to increase the amount recovered. In addition, the Home Office has introduced the Maintenance Enforcement Bill, which seeks to improve arrangements for paying maintenance under the current system.

For the future, we have introduced the Child Support Bill, which aims to replace the present child maintenance system, which is fragmented, uncertain in its results, slow and ineffective, with a Child Support Agency which will use a formula to calculate child maintenance. This will be available to all seeking child maintenance and it is hoped that it will be fully operational by 1995.

Incomes

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables similar to his Department's tax/benefit model table showing the net weekly spending power for each of *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a married couple with no children, *(c)* a couple with a child aged 11 years *(d)* a couple with two children aged eight and 11 years, *(e)* a couple with three children aged eight, 11 and 15 years, *(f)* a couple with four children aged three, eight, 11 and 15 years with weekly earnings of (i) £60, (ii) £80, (iii) £100, (iv) £120, (v) £140, (vi) £160, (vii) £180 and (viii) £200 under the existing tax and benefit system.

Mr. Jack: The information is set out in the tables. All assumptions are as set out in the published tax/benefit model tables. Each family is assumed to live in council property appropriate to its size and to pay estimated average rent and community charge.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents, so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

The figures are for the system before the Budget proposals come into effect and do not reflect the effect of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill presently before Parliament.

Single person (aged 25 or over)

	£ per week
Assumed rent	19·15
Assumed community charge	6·61

Gross earnings	*Tax*	*National insurance*	*Take home pay*	*Rent rebate*	*Community charge benefit*	*Total net income*	*Net income after rent and community charge*
£ per week	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*
60·00	0·55	2·18	57·27	9·03	2·95	69·25	43·49
80·00	5·55	3·98	70·47	0·00	0·97	71·44	45·68
100·00	10·55	5·78	83·67	0·00	0·00	83·67	57·91
120·00	15·55	7·58	96·87	0·00	0·00	96·87	71·11
140·00	20·55	9·38	110·07	0·00	0·00	110·07	84·31
160·00	25·55	11·18	123·27	0·00	0·00	123·27	97·57
180·00	30·55	12·98	136·47	0·00	0·00	136·47	110·71
200·00	35·55	14·78	149·67	0·00	0·00	149·67	123·91

Married couple

	£ per week
Assumed rent	19·15
Assumed community charge	13·22

Gross earnings	*Tax*	*National insurance*	*Take home pay*	*Rent rebate*	*Community charge benefit*	*Total net income*	*Net income after rent and community charge*
£ per week	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	19·15	10·58	87·55	55·18
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	13·68	9·31	99·01	66·64
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	3·33	6·93	102·20	69·83
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	0·00	4·95	110·09	77·72
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	0·00	2·97	121·31	88·94
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	0·00	0·99	132·53	100·16
180·00	22·28	12·98	144·74	0·00	0·00	144·74	112·37
200·00	27·28	14·78	157·94	0·00	0·00	157·94	125·57

Married couple with one child aged 11

	£ per week
Child benefit	7·25
Assumed rent	21·41
Assumed community charge	13·22

Gross earnings £ per week	Tax £ per week	National insurance £ per week	Take home pay £ per week	Family credit £ per week	Rent rebate £ per week	Community charge benefit £ per week	Total net income £ per week	Net income after rent and community charge £ per week
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	50·35	6·97	7·24	129·63	95.00
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	37·61	3·42	6·42	130·72	96·09
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	26·46	0·00	5·71	131·36	96·73
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	17·22	0·00	5·11	134·72	100·09
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	7·98	0·00	4·52	138·09	103·46
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	0·00	0·00	3·74	142·53	107·90
180·00	22·28	12·98	144·74	0·00	0·00	1·76	153·75	119·12
200·00	27·28	14·78	157·94	0·00	0·00	0·00	165·19	130·56

Married couple with two children aged 8 and 11.

	£ per week
Child Benefit	14·50
Assumed rent	23·43
Assumed community charge	13·22

Gross earnings Charge £ per week	Tax £ per week	National insurance £ per week	Take home pay £ per week	Family credit £ per week	Rent rebate £ per week	Community charge benefit £ per week	Total net income £ per week	Net income after rent and community charge £ per week
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	58·60	6·94	6·77	144·63	107·98
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	45·86	3·39	5·95	145·72	109·07
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	34·71	0·00	5·24	146·39	109·74
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	25·47	0·00	4·64	149·75	113·10
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	16·23	0·00	4·05	153·12	116·47
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	6·99	0·00	3·45	156·48	119·83
180·00	22·28	12·98	144·74	0·00	0·00	2·52	161·76	125·11
200·00	27·28	14·78	157·94	0·00	0·00	0·54	172·98	136·33

Married couple with three children aged 8, 11 and 15

	£ per week
Child Benefit	21·75
Assumed rent	23·43
Assumed community charge	13·22

Gross earnings £ per week	Tax £ per week	National insurance £ per week	Take home pay £ per week	Family Credit £ per week	Rent rebate £ per week	Community charge benefit £ per week	Total net income £ per week	Net income after rent and community charge £ per week
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	72·75	4·89	6·30	163·51	126·86
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	60·01	1·35	5·48	164·61	127·96
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	48·86	0·00	4·76	167·31	130·66
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	39·62	0·00	4·17	170·68	134·03
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	30·38	0·00	3·58	174·05	137·40
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	21·14	0·00	2·98	177·41	140·76
180·00	22·28	12·98	144·74	11·90	0·00	2·39	180·78	144·13
200·00	27·28	14·78	157·94	2·66	0·00	1·79	184·14	147·49

Married couple with four children aged 3, 8, 11 and 15

	£ per week
Child benefit	29·00
Assumed rent	23·43
Assumed community charge	13·22

Gross earnings	Tax	National insurance	Take home pay	Family credit	Rent rebate	Community charge benefit	Total net income	Net income after rent and community charge
£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	81·00	2·85	5·83	176·50	139·85
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	68·26	0·00	5·01	178·29	141·64
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	57·11	0·00	4·29	182·34	145·69
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	47·87	0·00	3·70	185·71	149·06
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	38·63	0·00	3·10	189·07	152·42
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	29·39	0·00	2·51	192·44	155·79
180·00	22·28	12·98	144·74	20·15	0·00	1·91	195·80	159·15
200·00	27·28	14·78	157·94	10·91	0·00	1·32	199·17	162·52

Widows' Benefits

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will identify the cost of extending widow's related benefits to widowers; and if he will provide the costing for extending each of these benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual costs would be approximately as follows:

	£ million
Widowers' £1,000 payment	25
Widowed father's allowance	90
Widowers pension (widowers aged 45-65)	300
Total	415

Fraud

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security claimants have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* found guilty of claiming benefit while working and receiving wages during each year from 1978-79 to the latest available date in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Scotland.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Supplementary Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of people, including children, dependent on supplementary benefit for 1979 and 1990; what is the projected number for 1991; and what was the number of supplementary benefit recipients for each of the years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information for 1990 is not available. Figures are given for 1979 and 1989, together with those projected for 1991-92.

Year	Claimants plus dependants 000s	Claimants 000s
1979 Supplementary Benefit	4,370	2,855
1989 Income Support	7,023	4,161
1991-92 Income support	7,157	4,240

Sources: Annual Statistical Enquiries for 1979 and 1989. Estimates based on Departmental Report (Cm. 1514).

Carers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give details of the social security benefits available to carers; and what steps his Department is taking to publicise the benefits;

(2) whether he will introduce a special payment for carers; and if he will make a statement on the financial position of carers.

Mr. Scott: All social security benefits are available to carers provided that they satisfy the relevant entitlement conditions. Invalid care allowance is the benefit specifically designed for carers. It is available to someone who has forgone the opportunity of full-time work in order to provide regular and substantial care to a severely disabled person. From 8 April 1991 the basic rate of invalid care allowance will be £31·25 each week. In addition, from October 1990, a carer premium of £10 a week, increasing to £10·80 in April 1991, was introduced in the income-related benefits, income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit for those receiving, or with an underlying entitlement to, invalid care allowance.

Information about invalid care allowance is contained in leaflet NI212, a revised and improved version of which will be available shortly. A leaflet about the carer premium (IS7) is available for professional advisers and the Department is currently working on the production of a leaflet detailing all benefits for carers which will be published later this year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the oral answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column 422, if he will publish the number of people on full social security benefit who were reimbursed for *(a)* the full 20 per cent. and *(b)* part of the 20 per cent. poll tax minimum payment in the current financial year.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no specific amount for the community charge in any one individual's benefit. The amount originally included in income support rates towards the 20 per cent. contribution was based on the average amount claimants were expected to have to pay. This now forms an integral part of overall rates.

Benefits and Contributions Agencies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will make an announcement about the establishment of the benefits and contributions agencies.

Mr. Newton: These agencies will come into being from April 1991 and I shall be formally launching them on 10 April. I am arranging for framework documents and business plans for both agencies to be placed in the Library.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claim each benefit payable *(a)* at each of the Nottingham social security offices and *(b)* in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 18 March 1991]:* Information for Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Information for the Nottingham area and for Great Britain is:

	Nottingham area[1]	*Great Britain*[1]
Income support[2]	51,490	4,492,000
Sickness benefit/Invalidity benefit	14,960	1,623,000
Maternity allowance	227	19,590
Severe disability allowance	2,817	382,600

[1] All data relates to 30 November 1990 and are provisional and subject to amendment.
[2] Derived from 100 per cent. count of cases in action, which include a number where payment has ceased but other action is continuing.

HEALTH

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what immediate assistance is being offered by his Department to *(a)* Kuwait and *(b)* Iraq to combat the outbreak of infections arising from the damage done to water purification systems in the Gulf war.

Mr. Dorrell: The International Committee of the Red Cross sanitation teams are helping to restore the distribution of purified water in Iraq. On 14 March 1991 their first two water purification units began producing potable water in Baghdad. The United Kingdom supports the International Committee of the Red Cross work and has contributed £2·5 million to its Gulf appeal. The Government of Kuwait have made arrangements for the supply of purified water to the population in Kuwait. The United Kingdom Government have also contributed US $1 million to the United Nations and agencies through the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation for their work in both these countries. We will be offering full collaboration to the United Nations and agencies for the supply of foodstuffs and medical supplies.

Haemophilia

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *86*, (1) from what date the imported unlicensed high purity product from Kabi will be available to the National Institute of Biological Standards and Control for testing; and what is the anticipated release date for patient treatment using this product;

(2) on the Bio Products Laboratory, what assurances have been given by the Medicines Control Agency as to the safety of the unlicensed product due to be imported from Sweden relative to the licensed product available for the United Kingdom;

(3) what assurance has been given that the Medicines Control Agency will be provided with full details of the patients and doctors involved in the named-patient import of the unlicensed high purity factor VIII produce from Sweden.

Mr. Dorrell: In my reply to the hon. Member of 19 February at column *86*, I explained that the Bio Products Laboratory's high purity product will be covered by arrangements leading to the removal of Crown immunity and is currently the subject of a full licensing application. The Medicines Control Agency will be considering this application. The product has already been tested by the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control and is now available to clinicians under these arrangements and not on a named patient basis.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions are in place to ensure that when Crown immunity ceases the Bio Products Laboratory will have to conform in all respects to the same controls of the Medicines Act and to the same fair trading and free competition practices as currently apply to the commercial plasma industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: Officials of the Medicines Control Agency have for some months provided guidance and advice not only to Bio Products Laboratory, but to others in the NHS affected by the cessation of Crown immunity and the controls of the Medicines Act. This advice service will continue after Crown immunity ceases, and subject to the transitional arrangements for the removal of Crown immunity, the BPL will be treated under the Medicines Act in the same way as other pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *86*, on the Bio Products Laboratory if he will indicate which products and facilities are currently licenced under cover of the licensing requirements of the Medicines Act.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested in respect of Bio Products Laboratory is confidential by virtue of the restrictions on disclosure contained in section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

In accordance with article 12 of the EC directive 65/65, the licensing authority publishes any grant of marketing authorisation in the Official Gazettes.

South Lincolnshire Health Authority

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* nurses were employed by the South Lincolnshire health authority in March 1979 and in March 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows information up to the latest available date, which is 30 September 1989.

South Lincolnshire Health Authority
Staff in Post at 30 September each year.

	Nursing and Midwifery	*Junior Staff*[5]
1979	1,720[3]	[2]n/a
1982	1,800[4]	61·1
1989	2,100	80·0

Junior Staff
[1] Grades include Registrars, Senior House Officers, House Officers and Other Staff. Numbers of staff at Senior doctor level are available by region only since the contracts for these staff are held by their regional Headquarters.

[2] 1979 and 1991 figures are not available.
[3] Figures not adjusted to take account of the reduction in nurses' working hours during 1980-81 (from 40 to 37·5 hours per week).
[4] Reorganisation of District Health Authorities took place in 1982. Figures for 1979 are therefore not directly comparable.

NHS Estate Directorate

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress establishing his Department's NHS estate directorate as an executive agency.

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to announce that the estates directorate will be established as the NHS estate management and health building agency on 1 April, the first executive agency in the Department of Health. The agency's roles are *(a)* to provide Ministers, the NHS management executive and the NHS with professional and technical policy advice and support in the fields of NHS estate management and health building, and *(b)* to develop and make available to NHS authorities, trusts and others a range of specialist guidance and other products and services which embody key national policies and standards and reflect current best NHS practice. The agency's detailed aims, objectives and functions are set out in a framework document, copies of which are available in the Library. In accordance with "next steps" principles the agency will be free to propose further adaptations to it if changing circumstances make this appropriate.

The chief executive has been set the following key performance targets for 1991-92:

To keep within the 1991-92 agreed public expenditure survey baseline.

To make at least a 2 per cent. efficiency saving on the operating costs that are within this control.

To deliver 80 per cent. of all contracts on time and within estimated costs, which will then act as the baseline for further improvements in succeeding years.

To agree the business plan and key performance targets with Ministers by 30 June 1991.

Over the next four years, in keeping with the spirit of the wider NHS reforms, I will be setting the agency a range of key performance targets to ensure that it delivers progressive improvements in the quality and efficiency of its services to the NHS.

Census

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are being made in the 1991 census to protect the confidentiality of forms for households where the enumerator is known to them.

Mr. Dorrell: Census officers have been given a general instruction not to place enumerators in enumeration districts where they are likely to be widely known. However, there are some places where—because of the geography of the area or the shortage of applicants—it is impossible to do otherwise. More particularly, in some remote rural areas it may be necessary to appoint an enumerator who lives in the locality.

The Census Regulations 1990 provide a facility to cover such situations: the form filler may ask for an envelope in which the completed form may be sealed before it is collected; the enumerator is prohibited from opening it. Enumerators are instructed to offer a sealed return envelope if they come across anyone they know.

The same facility is available under the Census (Scotland) Regulations 1990.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in deciding which small voluntary follow-up surveys will use the 1991 census as the sampling frame.

Mr. Dorrell: Initial proposals for such surveys were given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health in December 1989 during the debate on the draft Census Order, cols. 10-11, Report of Fourth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. The state of progress on each of the surveys mentioned in these initial proposals is given later. No others are proposed.

Plans are well advanced for surveys to check the accuracy of census information, the completeness of electoral registers and vacant accommodation in Scotland.

A research proposal has been produced for the Department of Environment on the proposed surveys in England on households occupying privately rented accommodation and households sharing accommodation. If these surveys go ahead, the field work will be carried out in late 1991 and early 1992.

Discussions are also being held with relevant departments on follow-up surveys of people with nursing qualifications and paramedical qualifications but not employed in these specialisms and of persons with social work and probation officer qualifications. Decisions on whether these surveys should go ahead will be made in early 1992. The census will not now be used as the sampling frame for a survey of out-of-service teachers.

The information leaflet to be delivered to each household with the census form in the 10 days before the census on 21 April includes the following statement:

"A very small sample of people and households will be asked to take part in one of several voluntary surveys. One survey will help the Census Offices check how well the Census itself worked. The other surveys will gather fuller information than it is possible to collect in a Census. Information gathered in any such survey will be handled entirely within the Census Offices. It will be treated in the same strict confidence as information given on the Census form."

The confidentiality of information collected in these surveys will now be covered by the Census Act 1920, as amended by the Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991, which received Royal Assent on 7 March.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his statement of 4 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns 173-74, on expressions of interest in national health service trust status, whether he has received any further expressions of interest in proceeding to develop their plans for national health service trust status for April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have now agreed that Southampton University hospital, which has expressed an interest in trust status, can proceed to work up an application to become a trust on 1 April 1992.

Hospital Beds (Children)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in district health authority hospitals in the North West region were set aside for children in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is provided in the following table. Before 1987-88, information collected

centrally on bed availability related to consultant department and did not show all beds set aside for children. Bed figures are now collected centrally by type of ward.

Number of average daily available children's beds
National health service hospitals
North Western regional health authority

	1979	1986	1989-90
Speciality/department			
Paediatrics	723	639	—
Special care baby unit	385	328	—
Psychiatry children	53	79	—
Paediatric surgery	0	93	—
TOTAL	1,161	1,139	—
Ward classification			
General patients	—	—	1,256
Neonates:			
Regionally designated intensive	—	—	59
Non-maternity	—	—	275
Maternity	—	—	534
Mental illness (short stay)	—	—	76
Mental handicap (short stay)	—	—	3
TOTAL			2,203

For more comprehensive information the hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. B. Martin, the chairman of the North Western regional health authority.

Carers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take to monitor the effect on carers of the return of patients to the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Local authorities, health authorities and family health services authorities will be expected to assess the community care needs of their residents and to show, in their community care plans, how they intend meeting them. We will be monitoring the implementation of their plans, through the Department's social services inspectorate and the NHS regional review process.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each regional health authority *(a)* the number of patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals and *(b)* the number of readmissions to psychiatric hospitals for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The information available on discharges, after an ordinary admission, from national health service hospitals and hospital units in England is contained in the table. All figures exclude day cases.

Figures on hospital stays are available only for the years 1987-88 and 1988-89. A finished hospital stay is defined here as a discharge from a hospital, or death in hospital, or transfer to another hospital, after a period of care in one of the mental illness specialities.

Figures for finished consultant episodes are also provided for 1989-90. A finished consultant episode is defined here as the period a patient is under the care of a particular consultant in one of the mental illness specialities. A consultant episode may finish when either a patient changes consultant, dies, is discharged into the community, or is transferred to another hospital outside the existing district health authority of treatment.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave concerning figures by admission status to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 13 February at column *417*.

Finished hospital stays and finished consultant episodes for patients with a mental illness after an ordinary admission

Regional health authority	*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*	
	Finished hospital stays	*Finished consultant episodes*	*Finished hospital stays*	*Finished consultant episodes*	*Finished hospital stays*	*Finished consultant episodes*
Northern	13,796	14,076	14,064	13,845	14,257	
Yorkshire	17,851	19,285	17,223	17,933	16,989	
Trent	16,116	16,432	16,808	16,958	16,830	
East Anglian	8,155	7,990	8,166	8,102	8,453	
North West Thames	14,577	13,474	15,487	15,316	14,961	
North East Thames	13,139	14,432	13,932	15,968	16,113	
South East Thames	14,401	15,253	13,965	14,986	15,900	
South West Thames	12,371	11,269	11,707	14,563	14,170	
Wessex	13,928	11,120	13,450	13,461	13,703	
Oxford	8,423	8,091	8,119	8,347	8,876	
South Western	16,958	17,435	16,123	17,591	16,269	
West Midlands	19,856	20,905	19,317	20,284	20,870	
Mersey	12,979	11,694	12,823	12,349	13,623	
North Western	19,673	20,034	19,744	20,721	21,754	
Special health authorities	1,750	1,989	1,698	1,781	1,791	
England total	203,973	203,479	202,626	212,205	214,559	

Source: SMI2C-SH3A and KP70.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor and evaluate the continuing care of patients discharged from psychiatric hospital into the community in accordance with paragraph 1.29 of "Community Care into the Next Decade and Beyond".

Mr. Dorrell: New arrangements for the discharge of patients from psychiatric hospitals, known as the care programme approach, come into effect on 1 April. We have asked regional health authorities to confirm by 30 April that the new arrangements are in place. We also intend to commission research into the operation of the care programme approach.

Baby Units

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of special care baby units available in hospitals in England and Wales and the total number of places, for each year that figures are available since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The available information is given in the table. It should be noted that some health authorities provide intensive care facilities within maternity units. Information in respect of hospitals in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Special care baby units NHS hospitals, England

Year	*Number of units (Provisional)*	*Average daily number of cots*
1979	237	3,945
1980	236	3,959
1981	231	3,940
1982	227	3,902
1983	230	3,898
1984	228	3,872
1985	225	3,754
1986	221	3,651
1987-88	206	3,567
1988-89	219	3,513
1989-90	213	3,451

ENVIRONMENT

Rents to Mortgages Scheme

14. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the pilot schemes to test the conversion of rents to mortgages for local authority tenants.

Sir George Young: Pilot schemes have been launched for new town tenants in Basildon and Milton Keynes. When the results are available, we will consider carefully whether to propose legislation extending rents to mortgages to local authority tenants.

Rural Development Commission

19. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total expenditure planned by the Rural Development Commission for the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Trippier: The Rural Development Commission estimates that its main programme expenditure on the Isle of Wight during the financial year 1991-92 will be around £800,000. This will be spent on workspace provision and a range of projects likely to help the local economy and the local community. In addition, the Commission's redundant building grant scheme and its business advisory service are available on the island.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

20. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with local authority associations on the implementation of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Trippier: Implementation of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 was one of a number of topics discussed at the first meeting of the Local and Central Government Environment Forum which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State chaired on 4 March. All three associations were present. Many meetings at official level have been held with the associations on particular parts of the Act which affect local authorities.

Community Charge

24. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of people who will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the area covered by Kirklees council.

Mr. Key: Our recent announcement means that every charge payer will first benefit from a cut in their bill of £140 after which community charge reductions and benefit are calculated. Our estimate of the number of people in England who will both get a £140 general reduction and a rates-related reduction is 8·2 million. Figures on the number of charge-payers in each area who will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme will be available once charging authorities have returned their grant claim forms to my Department.

25. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the workings of the community charge reduction scheme in relation to properties which were not individually rated.

Mr. Key: For practical reasons the community charge reduction scheme works by reference to the formerly rateable property and if a considerable number of people occupy the property, they receive little or no relief. However, such charge payers will all benefit from the £140 general reduction announced last week.

26. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to abolish the community charge by April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Bathing Water

27. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet water industry chiefs to discuss progress on implementing the EC directive on bathing water quality.

Mr. Baldry: We are fully committed to meeting the standards set in the directive as soon as is practicable and we maintain regular contacts with water companies about progress on their compliance programmes.

Estuaries

28. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council regarding the impact of the Leybucht Bay judgment in the European Court of Justice on the conservation of Britain's estuaries.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Local Government Finance

29. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to seek a form of local government taxation that costs the least amount to raise and to administer.

Mr. Portillo: As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 21 March, ease of collection is one of the principles underlying our proposals for a new local tax.

30. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his study of reforms of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I have nothing to add at this stage to my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 21 March.

31. **Mr. Carr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the Government's review of the poll tax.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has met representatives of the Social and Liberal Democratic party, the Scottish Nationalist party, Plaid Cymru and the Ulster Unionist party as well as the local authority associations. Further meetings will be arranged as appropriate. In addition, we continue to receive a large volume of correspondence from hon. and right hon. Members of this House, representations from various institutions and organisations, and letters from the general public.

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of total local government current expenditure, excluding grants for domestic rate rebates, was accounted for by central Government revenue grant in each year from 1978-79 to the current year 1991-92; and what additional amount of Government grant would have been necessary to bring the percentage of Government grant in total local authority current expenditure up to the 1978-79 level.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information for the English local authorities is as follows:

Government Grants to Local Authorities

	Government grants[1] as a percentage of local authority expenditure Per cent.	*Additional grant needed to bring percentage to 1978-79 level* *Cash £ billion*	*Real terms (1978-79 prices) £ billion*
1978-79 [2]	61	0	0
1979-80 [2]	59	0·36	0·31
1980-81 [2]	59	0·54	0·39
1981-82	55	1·21	0·80
1982-83	52	1·96	1·21
1983-84	52	2·12	1·25
1984-85	52	2·15	1·21
1985-86	51	2·35	1·25
1986-87	48	3·51	1·81
1987-88	46	4·12	2·01
1988-89	44	5·13	2·33
1989-90	42	6·22	2·66
1990-91	38	8·10	3·21
1991-92	51	3·94	1·46

[1] For the years 1978-89 to 1989-90 Government grants comprises aggregate Exchequer grant and rate rebate grants (excluding domestic rate rebates). For 1990-91 Government grants include revenue support grant, special grants, specific grants in aggregate external finance and transitional relief grant, but excludes community charge benefits. Government grants for 1991-92 are the same as 1990-91 except for the addition of Community charge grant.

[2] England and Wales—Community charge payers receive additional help through community charge benefit. In 1991-92 this is likely to be worth £1 billion (over £2·5 billions in 1978-79 prices).

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what he estimates will be the cost to local authorities of the delay in sending out community charge invoices in the current year.

Mr. Key *[holding answer Tuesday 26 March 1991]:* None. The profile of payments to local authorities from the distributable amount of the non-domestic rate will be changed to increase the amounts paid in the early months of 1991-92. This will compensate authorities for the temporary cash shortfall likely to result from the proposals in the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill and related measures.

The Gulf

32. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what actions he has taken to help alleviate Gulf oil slicks and oil well fires since 15 March.

Mr. Baldry: We will endeavour to respond positively to requests we receive from the Gulf states wherever we are in a position to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the *Official Report*, 15 March, column *1384*, what response he has had from the Kuwaiti Government about Dr. Nigel Downing's proposals for protecting coral atolls.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 March 1991]:* Dr. Downing's recommendations for minimising ecological damage to offshore coral reefs within the Gulf war zone have been passed both to the military authorities and, following the restoration of the Government of Kuwait, to them. I will write to the hon. Member when I have substantive news.

Local Authority Expenditure

33. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the highest, lowest and average increase in spending levels by local authorities over the three years 1988-89 to 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Comparing budgets in 1990-91 with comparable figures in 1988-89 for each local authority gives

the highest increase as 320 per cent. in Labour controlled Southampton; and

the lowest increase as minus 74 per cent. in Conservative controlled Runnymede.

The average increase for England as a whole is 20 per cent.

Homelessness

34. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any new proposals to deal with the shortage of hostel bed spaces for homeless people in major cities.

Sir George Young: Of the latest figures available, housing associations provide a total of 50,000 hostel bed spaces in England, of which some 20,000 are in London. The Government have allocated £96 million over three years to provide additional hostel and longer-term accommodation for single homeless people in London. We are considering how this programme might be extended to other major cities in the future.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the Government's initiative on homelessness.

Sir George Young *[pursuant to the reply of 22 January 1991, Official Report, column 155]:* I have today approved additional allocations totalling £115 million to 106 authorities in London and the south-east. The schemes should provide more than 6,000 extra lettings for the homeless, reducing the need to use temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Priority has been given to bringing empty properties back into use and cash incentive schemes. Today's announcement brings the total allocated to local authorities under the two year initiative to £227 million. Full details of individual allocations to local authorities are set out in a press release which has been placed in the Library.

Defective Property

35. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to extend the numbers or types of property covered by the defects liability legislation.

Mr. Yeo: No. The Building Research Establishment's comprehensive study of all non-traditional house types has identified no further types which would merit designation under the housing defects legislation.

London Boroughs (Statutory Burdens)

36. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will examine the scope for additional departmental assistance to outer London boroughs incurring unavoidable additional expenditure outlays from additional statutory burdens since 1987.

Mr. Portillo: New responsibilities falling to local authorities are taken into account in the annual local authority finance settlement and are reflected in standard spending assessments for individual authorities.

For 1991-92 total standard spending assessments for outer London boroughs will increase by 21·5 per cent. and total external support by an estimated 36 per cent. including an estimated 20 per cent. in respect of the new community charge grant announced by my right hon. Friend on 19 March.

Lambeth Council

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will respond to a request to meet the hon. Member for Norwood to discuss the budget, poll tax and debt write-off of Lambeth council.

Mr. Key: I have replied to the hon. Member.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the housing investment programme allocations for Lambeth for each of the last five years; to what extent the approved programme has been achieved in Lambeth in each year; and what will be the programme for 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: The total housing capital allocations made to the London borough of Lambeth by central Government for each of the last five years are set out below. Actual expenditure on the housing investment programme is also given; this includes reinvestment of capital receipts. Copies of the council's housing strategy statements, which set out in detail the extent to which expenditure on each element of the proposed programme accorded with the council's original plans, have been placed in the Library of the House. The housing investment programme allocation for the year 1991-92 is £33·2 million—the extent to which the council will incur expenditure above this level is likely to depend on its ability to generate receipts particularly from the right to buy.

£ million	*Housing capital allocations—total*	*Housing investment programme expenditure*
1986-87	35·6	56·2
1987-88	34·0	56·6
1988-89	30·7	37·1
1989-90	23·5	68·3
1990-91	[2]30·6	[1]44·7

[1] Estimate

[2] excludes further resources of approximately £7 million earmarked but not yet allocated

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the urban aid programme allocation for Lambeth for each of the last five years; to what extent it has been taken up by Lambeth in each year; and what will be the allocation for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The following table gives full details of the London borough of Lambeth's urban programme allocation and outturn figures, excluding the DHA allocation, for the last five years, and the provisional allocation for 1991-92.

£ million

Year	*Allocation*	*Outturn*
1986-87	12·566	10·930
1987-88	11·170	6·421
1988-89	9·745	7·640

Year	Allocation	Outturn
1989-90	8·825	8·563
1990-91	8·648	n/a
1991-92	8·434	n/a

Environmental Information

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to update Pollution Paper No. 23 (1986) on "Public Access to Environmental Information."

Mr. Trippier: No. The paper was the report of an interdepartmental working party. The Government accepted its broad thrust. It also fully supports the EC directive of 7 June 1990 on freedom of access to information on the environment.

Millbank, London

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer given by the Lord President of the Council on 7 March, *Official Report*, columns *624-25*, about the possible leasing of 7 Millbank, London SW1, for use as offices for hon. Members and staff, how many rooms are available; on what dates in 1991 the offices will become available; what rent is being requested; what length of lease is being sought; and whether any office furniture or catering facilities will be included in any deal.

Mr. Yeo: While No. 7 Millbank remains one of a number of properties under consideration there is nothing I can add usefully to the information given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Councils.

Housing

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total expenditure by his Department on publicising the Homes scheme during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; what steps he has taken to ensure that the rate of expenditure is sufficient to communicate effectively with the section of the community at which it is aimed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A major part of Homes activity is the general promotion and publicity, throughout the UK, of housing mobility and exchange schemes to local authorities and housing associations, and their tenants. Regular financial and monitoring reports on this work are submitted to the Department. In the current financial year Government funding of Homes is £1·55 million, of which £1·48 million is contributed by the Department of the Environment. £50,000 of this total budget relates specifically to the costs of publicity materials such as application forms, information leaflets and posters.

Right To Buy

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses and flats were sold in Ealing in each of the past six years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Tables giving the annual total of sales for each English local authority since 1979-80 are in the Library.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet made a decision in relation to the right to buy of residents of elderly persons' dwellings at Arden close in Weston-super-Mare referred to in letters from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare dated 6 September 1990, 4 December 1990 and 27 February 1991.

Mr. Yeo: A decision has now been made and I have written to my hon. Friend.

Nitrogen Oxide

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to put in the Library the final report into evaluation of nitrogen oxide abatement technologies for large combustion plants which he anticipated receiving early in autumn 1990.

Mr. Baldry: A report on NOx abatement technologies was received by my Department late in 1990. It is still being considered.

Wandsworth (Housing)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the London borough of Wandsworth to increase the provision of low-cost housing in the borough; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My Department discusses housing policy issues each year with individual local authorities through the housing investment programme meetings. The London regional office maintains regular contact with the London borough of Wandsworth and other London authorities on all aspects of housing policy. The Housing Corporation also holds discussions about allocations under its approved development programme.

Environmental Statistics

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the next digest of environmental protection and water statistics.

Mr. Trippier: The 13th annual digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics was published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Detergents

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report of the study he has commissioned into the problems that may be caused by pollutants in detergents; and what further steps he intends to take.

Mr. Trippier: A report "Pollutants in Cleaning Agents" has now been received from Consultants in Environmental Sciences Ltd. and copies are being placed in the Library. We will now be consulting widely on the findings of that study.

West Yorkshire Residuary Body

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the West Yorkshire residuary body will be dissolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The West Yorkshire body will formally be dissolved on 31 March 1991 by an order made under

section 67 of the Local Government Act 1985. The order transfers the remainder of the residuary body's property, functions, rights and liabilities to successor authorities. The residuary body's final report and accounts will be laid before Parliament in due course.

During the five years since abolition the record of the residuary body has been impressive. It inherited well over 25,000 property interests, as well as numerous other complex rights and liabilities from the former West Yorkshire metropolitan county council. In identifying property which was surplus and successfully bringing it on to the market it showed how unused and underused public assets can be released. As a result the body has been able to distribute to the West Yorkshire districts some £50 million from surplus property sales and revenue balances for the benefit of the local charge payers. This is a remarkable achievement and much credit goes to all concerned for a job well done. I wish to pay tribute to the chairman, Sir Tom McDonald, the board members and staff for the part they have played in this highly successful operation.

All six metropolitan residuary bodies have now completed their work. This effectively draws to a close a chapter of local government re-organisation.

West Midlands Residuary Body

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the West Midlands residuary body will be dissolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The West Midlands residuary body will formally be dissolved on 31 March 1991 by an order made under section 67 of the Local Government Act 1985. The order transfers the remainder of the residuary body's property, functions, rights and liabilities to successor authorities. The residuary body's final report and accounts will be laid before Parliament in due course.

On abolition the residuary body inherited some 5,000 former county council property interests. Surplus properties of substantial value have been identified and successfully disposed of on the market while those needed for continuing functions have been transferred to the district councils. The residuary body has been able to distribute some £110 million to successors from property sales and revenue balances for the benefit of the local charge payers. It is a credit to all concerned that the residuary body's tasks have been successfully completed within the statutory timescale. I would like to pay tribute to the chairman, Sir Tom McDonald, his predecessor, Dr. Malcolm Skillcorn, the board members and the staff for their contribution to this achievement.

All six metropolitan residuary bodies have now completed their work. This effectively draws to a close a chapter of local government reorganisation.

Business Rates

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to modify the transitional arrangements for non-domestic rates.

Mr. Key: We have today issued a consultation paper on proposals which would mean that private sector companies winning contracts to carry out defined activities would, when the previous occupier of the premises was the local authority, be eligible for transitional relief under the new non-domestic rating system.

These proposals are intended to restore competitiveness for private sector companies bidding for local authority contracts under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988.

Under the present rules, transitional relief is generally lost when there is a change of occupier of a building. This means that private sector firms tendering to take over work previously done by a local authority would have to include the higher costs of the full rates bill in their bid. The new rules would put them on an equal footing.

It would not be necessary for an authority's direct services organisation to participate in the tendering process for a firm to qualify for relief, but relief would cease if there were any further change of occupation.

We would propose to introduce the necessary regulations as soon as possible after consultation. I have placed a copy of the consultation paper in the Library.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is carrying out a similar exercise and a copy of his consultation paper has also been placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of *(a)* unskilled, *(b)* semi-skilled and *(c)* skilled persons (i) in the entire work force and (ii) classified as unemployed in Britain; and what information he has on conparable figures in other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries, showing in each case the actual figure and percentage of the total work force.

Mr. Jackson: The Great Britain labour force survey provides estimates of people in skilled occupations. Preliminary results from the 1990 labour force survey are shown in the following table:

Economically active and unemployed by social class
Great Britain, Spring 1990

	Economically active[2]		*Unemployed*[2]	
	Thousands	*Per cent.*	*Thousands*	*Per cent.*
All persons[1]	28,037	100	1,869	100
Professional and Intermediate Occupations	8,283	30	187	10
Skilled Occupations	13,117	47	604	32
Partly skilled Occupations	4,315	15	300	16
Unskilled Occupations	1,373	5	133	7

[1] Includes some who did not adequately describe their occupation or who were not asked.
[2] Includes those in employment and the unemployed.

[2] The social class of the unemployed is based on their previous occupation, except for those who left their last job more than three years ago, or who have never had a job, who are not asked about their previous occupation.
Source: 1990 Labour Force Survey, preliminary results.

This does not exactly equate to skilled persons. For instance, skilled people working in unskilled occupations will be classified as unskilled. No reliable comparable figures are available for other OECD countries.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff are employed in all aspects of paying unemployment benefit and dealing with tribunals and fraud; and how many separate premises they occupy.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff are employed in *(a)* unemployment benefit offices, *(b)* job centres, *(c)* the Training Agency and *(d)* the remainder of his Department; and how many separate buildings are occupied for each.

Mr. Jackson: I regret that the information is not readily available in the form requested. As at 1 January 1991 there were 26,040 people employed in the Employment Service local office network which comprises unemployment benefit offices and jobcentres. There were 990 staff employed in the training, enterprise and education directorate, formerly the Training Agency headquarters, and 8,266 in the ED headquarters regions, formerly the Training Agency regions. There were 14,909 staff employed in the remainder of the ED group.

There are 676 buildings occupied by unemployment benefit offices, 680 by jobcentres and 300 by integrated offices. There are 107 buildings occupied by TEED and ED headquarters regional offices. The remainder of the ED group occupies 282 buildings.

Employment Training, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to enable Bradford and District training and enterprise council to assist the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders employment training centre in Bradford to continue; how many trainees are currently receiving training at NACRO in Bradford; what training is available; what alternative training will be offered to NACRO trainees if the Bradford centre closes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The responsibility for identifying and meeting local training and enterprise needs in Bradford rests with Bradford and District training and enterprise council. It is for Bradford TEC to use its resources to decide which organisations it contracts with to ensure that these needs are met, and I cannot intervene in their contracting decisions.

NACRO in Bradford provides employment training in clerical, secretarial and elementary occupations, and also initial training via a subcontractor. As at 1 March 1991, 79 ET trainees were in training.

Bradford and District TEC has offered NACRO three contract closure options. NACRO has expressed a preference for a residual contract to 30 June 1991 at new funding rates and are currently giving this further consideration. This would enable most trainees to complete their ET with NACRO.

There are many other local training providers offering similar training to that provided by NACRO. Bradford and District TEC will seek to minimise any disruption caused to those trainees who are required to transfer to another training provider to complete their training.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the report by the Robens Institute at Surrey university into accidents in the youth training scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have placed a copy of the report in the Library of the House.

We have recently been given further attention to the needs of trainees in the new training environment created by the advent of training and enterprise councils, and other initiatives such as the introduction of employment training, youth training and training credits.

Our policy for the health and safety of trainees has been in place for a number of years, as the youth opportunities programme and youth training schemes followed by ET and YT, have evolved. The foundations of this policy are that the primary legal and moral responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of trainees rests with those who are providing the training, whether in a college or in the workplace. To this end we have provided in the Health and Safety (Training for Employment) Regulations 1990 for unemployed trainees in training with an employer to have the same legal protection under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act as they would if they were employees. The Government will use their best endeavours to ensure that those responsible for arranging and delivering training understand their obligations and are given appropriate help and support in carrying them out.

It is our aim to promote quality training programmes which enjoy the full confidence of the public. This includes firm policies for accident prevention and occupational health protection. As part of the training objective we aim to provide each trainee with health and safety skills and knowledge which they can carry forward into their working life.

Through their contracts with my Department TECs are contractually bound to have satisfactory systems to ensure their providers and their sub-contractors have adequate health and safety arrangements. My Department, through its regional offices, appraises TEC proposals in these respects and monitors performance when contracts are signed. To enhance the ability of the regional offices to perform this task their professional resources—regional safety advisers—are being strengthened overall.

We are also embarking on a range of other new measures. The existing publications and training materials provided by the Department are being reviewed, evaluated and then revised to provide relevant and up-to-date support and guidance to trainers and trainees alike. Gaps in existing provision will be identified and new products developed.

For TECs we will be examining a targeted approach to their health and safety activities. Our aim is to establish standards to which they can work and by which their performance can be measured.

With the Health and Safety Executive we will be looking at the consequences of coming European Community legislation for health and safety training and the health and safety content of national vocational qualifications.

Finally, taking into account the recommendations of the Robens Institute report a working group including representative of TECs is looking at the need of accident data collection in relation to employment training and youth training in the TEC era.

Altogether this represents a very considerable commitment of public resources to the health and safety of trainees.

Regional Offices (Expenditure)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a table of expenditure showing the cost of running each regional office of his Department and the cost of running sub-regional offices aggregated by region and with London shown separately, for 1989-90 and excluding the funding programmes operated by the offices.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Financial year 1989-90 Outturn

Region	*Regional office £'000s*	*Area office £'000s*	*Total £'000s*
South East	2,985	9,548	12,534
London	4,586	9,558	14,144
South West	1,816	5,919	7,735
West Midlands	3,450	7,624	11,074
East Midlands	2,251	7,680	9,931
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,959	6,759	9,719
North West	2,866	11,671	14,537
Northern	2,322	5,859	8,181
Wales	1,975	5,306	7,282
Scotland	3,876	8,469	12,345
TOTAL	29,087	78,393	107,480

Note: All figures are £'000s and show the cost of former Training Agency offices.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Overseas Electors Scheme

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost, broken down into all expenditure heads, of the implementation of the overseas electors scheme.

Mrs. Rumbold: The main extra costs involved in implementing the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1989 are set out in the table. The staffing costs were absorbed within existing provision and are not separately identifiable.

	£
Advertising campaign (Home Office)	480,000
Leaflets and posters (including distribution costs)	63,000
Application forms	40,000
Advertising campaign (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)	250,000
Administration costs (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)	100,000
Costs to local authorities (1990-91)	[1]86,000
Total	1,019,000

[1] Estimate.

Volunteer Centre UK

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Volunteer Centre UK to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. John Patten: I am glad to lend my support to such an exhibition, which will encourage attention to the value of volunteering and to the contribution which the Volunteer Centre UK makes in promoting it. I understand that the exhibition will take place from 24 to 28 June and I look forward to visiting it.

Legislation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the differences between the legislation in force in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* England and Wales with respect to (i) the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, (ii) the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and (iii) codes of practice made under these Acts, and similar legislation applying to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 extends to the whole of the United Kingdom with the exception of the provisions listed in section 28(2) of the Act. The differences between the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 were set out in the explanatory document to the 1989 order, a copy of which was sent to the hon. Member in July 1988. The main difference between the four codes of practice issued under article 65 of the 1989 order and the four codes issued under section 66 of the 1984 Act which came into force in England and Wales on 1 January 1986 is that the Northern Ireland codes of practice do not apply to the exercise of powers conferred by or under the Prevention of Terrorism Act or to arrest or detention under that Act. In addition, the Northern Ireland code C for the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers reflects the provisions of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 which has no equivalent in England and Wales.

Business Corruption

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statutory provisions that relate to the offer of corrupt inducements to employees.

Mr. John Patten: In England and Wales the principal legislative provisions relating to the bribery of employees

are the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889 and the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1906 and 1916. Bribery of a public official is also an offence at common law.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to seek to amend the law relating to business corruption.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any new appointments have been made to the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Miss Beryl Wallis, who retired from a senior post in IBM United Kingdom Ltd. in February 1991, has accepted my invitation to serve as a member of the Police Complaints Authority. She will take up her post on 29 April 1991.

Brigadier Anthony Vivian, who was until 4 March 1990 colonel of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, has accepted my invitation to serve as a member of the Police Complaints Authority. He will take up his post on 2 April 1991.

Forensic Science Agency

Sir Gerrard Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards establishing the forensic science service as an executive agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am pleased to announce that the Forensic Science Service will be established on 1 April 1991 as an executive agency of the Home Office. The FSS plays a vital role in the administration of justice principally by providing scientific support in the investigation of crime and expert evidence to the courts.

From 1 April the FSS will recover its full costs through charging its customers direct for the services it provides. In preparation for this the FSS last year made substantial changes in its organisation and style of operation. Agency status will give the FSS the managerial and financial freedom it needs to continue improving its efficiency and effectiveness thereby giving its customers better value for money. It will also enable the FSS to maintain its high standards of scientific work and quality. I have set the agency challenging performance targets including recovery of full costs, a unit cost of £579·50 and a unit cost productivity gain of 1·75 per cent. in 1991-92.

I have appointed Dr. Janet Thompson, the director general of the FSS, as its first chief executive. Details of the principles by which the FSS will operate are set out in the framework document, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Passport Department

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards establishing the passport department as an executive agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am pleased to announce that the passport department of the Home Office will be established as an executive agency on 2 April. The full title of the agency will be the United Kingdom Passport Agency. I shall be placing a copy of the agency's framework document in the Library.

The main aim of the passport agency will be to provide passport services to British nationals promptly and economically. The agency will be starting from a sound base in fulfilling this aim. I am confident that the enhanced freedoms and responsibilities which the framework document grants to it will enable it to deliver further improvements in its service to customers while providing better value for money.

The key targets which I have set the agency for its first year of operation are:

(i) to reduce the time taken to process properly completed, straightforward applications to a maximum of 20 working days in the period of peak demand from January to July and to a maximum of 10 working days at other times.

(ii) to reduce unit costs by at least 2·3 per cent. in real terms.

The chief executive will be directly accountable to me for the performance of the passport agency. An advisory board including two private sector members with experience of delivering services to the public will help me to assess the agency's performance.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum, by nationality, were made *(a)* on entry and *(b)* after entry to the United Kingdom in each month since June 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The readily available information is given in the following table. Some of the figures for 1990 will understate because of delays in recording. Reliable figures for the fourth quarter of 1990 are not yet available.

Applications [1,2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, by location[3] of application and nationality: 1989-90

	1989				1990					
	Q3		Q4		Q1		Q2		Q3	
	Made on Entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry
Europe										
Czechoslovakia	5	30	•	5	—	•	—	—	—	—
Hungary	—	5	•	•	—	•	—	•	—	—
Poland	—	15	•	10	—	5	—	5	—	•
Romania	—	•	—	5	—	5	—	20	•	75
Turkey	10	125	20	105	10	125	40	170	170	80
Yugoslavia	5	5	—	•	•	•	•	5	•	•
Others	•	25	5	15	5	20	5	30	5	60
Total	25	210	30	145	20	155	45	230	180	220

	1989				1990					
	Q3		Q4		Q1		Q2		Q3	
	Made on Entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry	Made on entry	Made after entry
Americas										
Chile	•	5	—	5	—	•	—	—	—	—
Colombia	15	10	10	15	10	10	25	25	15	15
Others	—	5	—	5	5	10	5	10	5	10
Total	20	20	10	25	15	20	30	35	15	20
Africa										
Angola	25	65	20	70	65	75	95	135	65	100
Ethiopia	100	125	140	105	75	120	225	160	490	460
Ghana	5	85	20	120	30	190	25	140	20	385
Libya	—	5	—	5	—	•	•	5	—	5
Seychelles	•	10	5	10	•	10	—	5	•	•
Somalia	795	205	815	110	400	75	315	195	600	505
South Africa	•	5	5	•	•	10	•	5	•	•
Sudan	5	45	•	60	—	60	—	40	—	40
Uganda	295	195	330	215	250	210	320	230	410	540
Zaire	5	190	50	275	5	420	40	400	80	1,140
Others	•	35	5	25	25	60	25	35	35	35
Total	1,230	960	1,390	990	855	1,235	1,045	1,350	1,700	3,215
Middle East										
Iran	35	90	50	70	65	45	40	50	60	75
Iraq	65	55	75	25	135	25	145	55	395	135
Lebanon	20	35	65	35	60	40	45	15	165	115
Syria	—	5	—	—	—	•	5	—	•	•
Others	•	5	—	20	•	10	5	5	•	15
Total	120	195	190	160	260	120	240	120	625	340
Asia										
Afghanistan	25	5	20	5	20	5	35	20	45	30
Bangladesh	•	—	—	•	•	5	5	10	•	5
India	•	175	•	245	5	335	—	330	5	410
Pakistan	—	70	•	135	10	185	5	165	15	415
Sri Lanka	270	275	760	285	560	220	510	200	540	305
Others	5	45	5	35	10	30	—	20	—	55
Total	300	565	785	710	600	780	555	740	605	1,225
Other and unknown nationality	25	40	65	25	50	25	65	20	75	25
Grand Total	1,715	1,985	2,470	2,050	1,800	2,340	1,980	2,495	3,200	5,040

[1]Provisional and estimated figures: some of those for 1990 will understate because of delays in recording. Figures rounded to nearest 5, with '•' = less than 3.

[2]Including dependants applying with the principal applicant, and those, to date, arriving subsequently but before the principal application was decided. Figures are tabulated by the date and location of the principal application.

[3]Excluding applications made from overseas.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing how many cattle in the past three years have been certified as suffering from BSE; of these how many were *(a)* cows of generally recognised milk breeds and *(b)* cows of generally recognised beef breeds; how many of the cows in each case were (i) under three years old, (ii) between three and six years old, (iii) between six and nine years old and (iv) over nine years; and how many cattle so certified were (1) maiden heifers of milk breeds, (2) maiden heifers of beef breeds, (3) bulls (A) under and (B) over three years, (4) steers and (5) calves.

Mr. Maclean: From when the disease was first identified in November 1986 up to and including 18 March 1991 the total number of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom was 25,826. Out of these, 24 were in cattle whose dams were themselves affected and 23 of these were born before the introduction, in July 1988, of the ban on the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminants, and were exposed to a source of food-borne infection. The single remaining case was born in November 1988, after the imposition of the feed ban. This one animal should not have been fed on ruminant-derived protein and its feeding regime, and other possible sources of infection, are being investigated. The possibility of maternal transmission is one that will have to be examined.

In a MAFF research project studying under controlled conditions 316 calves of cows affected with BSE, no animal has yet succumbed to BSE, even though 262 of them are older than the single case already mentioned. Even if this were a case of maternal transmission, it would have no significance for public health. The measures taken to deal with BSE (the slaughter and destruction of suspect animals, and a ban on the use for human or animal consumption of those tissues that might harbour the agent in pre-clinical cases) apply in all cases, regardless of how infection might have been acquired. The only significance for animal health might be that if maternal transmission were found to occur in some cases, eradication of BSE might take rather longer than would otherwise be the case. This was a point addressed by Dr. David Tyrell in his

advice to the Government. He concluded that no Government action was necessary to control the use for breeding of the offspring of cattle affected by BSE.

The rest of the information requested is as follows (excluding unattributable cases):

	Dairy mixed herds	*Beef herds*
Calves	0	0
Maiden heifers	0	0
Under 3 years		
Cows	101	11
Bulls	0	1
3 to 5 years inclusive		
Cows	17,542	1,050
Bulls	32	14
Steers	1	0
6 to 9 years inclusive		
Cows	4,440	334
Bulls	11	3
10 years and over		
Cows	46	13
Bulls	0	0

Cereals

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of *(a)* wheat and *(b)* all cereals produced in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) the EEC, (iii) north America, and (iv) the rest of the world has been used in each year since 1979 (1) for human consumption, (2) for animal feed, (3) for other processes, and (4) destroyed; and if he will give these figures as a percentage of world production in each case.

Mr. Curry: The information, where readily available, is shown in the tables, the coverage of which varies according to sources. No information is available on the destruction of grain, but data on losses are shown where recorded. Information on the rest of the world as a whole is not readily available in the form requested.

United Kingdom usage of:

million tonnes

	Wheat				*All cereals (excluding rice)*			
	Human consumption	*Animal feed*	*[1]Other processes*	*Losses*	*Human consumption*	*Animal feed*	*[1]Other processes*	*Losses*
1979-80	5·1 (1·2)	3·9 (0·9)	0·3 (0·0)	0·1 (0·0)	6·4 (0·5)	11·6 (1·0)	3·5 (0·3)	0·3 (0·0)
1980-81	5·0 (1·1)	3·6 (0·8)	0·3 (0·0)	0·1 (0·0)	6·2 (0·5)	10·7 (0·9)	3·1 (0·3)	0·3 (0·0)
1981-82	4·8 (1·0)	3·4 (0·7)	0·3 (0·0)	0·2 (0·0)	6·2 (0·5)	9·6 (0·8)	3·0 (0·2)	0·3 (0·0)
1982-83	4·9 (1·0)	3·9 (0·8)	0·3 (0·0)	0·2 (0·0)	6·3 (0·5)	10·2 (0·8)	3·0 (0·2)	0·4 (0·0)
1983-84	5·0 (1·0)	4·0 (0·8)	0·3 (0·0)	0·2 (0·0)	6·3 (0·5)	10·2 (0·9)	3·1 (0·3)	0·4 (0·0)
1984-85	4·8 (0·9)	4·9 (0·9)	0·5 (0·1)	0·2 (0·0)	6·0 (0·4)	10·0 (0·7)	2·8 (0·2)	0·5 (0·0)
1985-86	4·9 (1·0)	5·5 (1·1)	0·6 (0·1)	0·2 (0·0)	6·1 (0·4)	10·3 (0·7)	2·7 (0·2)	0·4 (0·0)
1986-87	4·9 (0·9)	6·2 (1·1)	0·7 (0·1)	0·3 (0·0)	6·2 (0·4)	11·2 (0·8)	2·7 (0·2)	0·5 (0·0)
1987-88	5·7 (1·1)	5·7 (1·1)	0·8 (0·2)	0·2 (0·0)	6·5 (0·5)	10·5 (0·8)	2·9 (0·2)	0·4 (0·0)
1988-89	5·4 (1·0)	5·2 (1·0)	0·9 (0·2)	0·2 (0·0)	6·5 (0·5)	10·0 (0·8)	3·0 (0·2)	0·4 (0·0)
1989-90	5·1 (0·9)	5·4 (1·0)	0·9 (0·2)	0·3 (0·0)	6·5 (0·5)	10·0 (0·7)	3·4 (0·2)	0·4 (0·0)

[1]Industrial uses, including grains for malting, plus seeds.

Notes:

Figures in parenthesis are quantities used as percentage of world production.

(0·0) Negligible.

Source: MAFF.

European Community [1] Usage of

million tonnes

	Wheat (including durum)				*All Cereals (excluding rice)*			
	Human Consumption	*Animal Feed*	*[2]Other Processes*	*Losses*	*Human Consumption*	*Animal Feed*	*[2]Other Processes*	*Losses*
1979-80	28·0 (6·5)	12·4 (2·9)	2·6 (0·6)	0·6 (0·1)	30·7 (2·6)	72·9 (6·2)	15·0 (1·3)	1·7 (0·1)
1980-81	32·2 (7·2)	13·8 (3·1)	3·2 (0·7)	0·6 (0·1)	35·5 (3·0)	86·5 (7·4)	—	1·9 (0·2)
1981-82	31·8 (7·0)	14·2 (3·1)	3·2 (0·7)	0·6 (0·1)	35·2 (2·8)	85·7 (6·9)	—	1·8 (0·1)
1982-83	30·7 (6·4)	15·5 (3·2)	3·4 (0·7)	0·7 (0·1)	35·4 (2·8)	86·1 (6·7)	—	1·9 (0·1)
1983-84	30·7 (6·2)	21·2 (4·3)	3·7 (0·7)	0·8 (0·2)	35·5 (3·0)	87·4 (7·3)	—	1·8 (0·2)
1984-85	31·5 (6·1)	23·0 (4·4)	3·9 (0·8)	0·9 (0·2)	36·6 (2·7)	90·3 (6·8)	15·6 (1·2)	2·2 (0·2)
1985-86	31·7 (6·3)	22·5 (4·4)	4·1 (0·8)	0·9 (0·2)	36·7 (2·7)	87·8 (6·4)	15·8 (1·2)	2·1 (0·2)
1986-87	31·6 (5·9)	23·5 (4·4)	4·3 (0·8)	0·9 (0·2)	36·6 (2·6)	84·8 (6·1)	15·5 (1·1)	2·1 (0·2)
1987-88	31·9 (6·2)	21·1 (4·1)	4·4 (0·9)	0·9 (0·2)	37·0 (2·8)	80·3 (6·1)	16·0 (1·2)	2·0 (0·2)
1988-89	31·6 (6·2)	21·2 (4·2)	4·9 (1·0)	0·9 (0·2)	36·7 (2·9)	80·7 (6·4)	16·3 (1·3)	2·1 (0·2)
1989-90	31·3 (5·8)	21·6 (4·0)	5·0 (0·9)	0·4 (0·1)	35·6 (2·6)	78·2 (5·7)	16·6 (1·2)	1·1 (0·1)

[1] EC10 for 1979-80; EC12 from 1980-81 to 1989-90.

[2] Industrial usage and seed.

Notes:

Figures in parenthesis are quantities used as percentage of world production. MAFF estimates using FAO data or world production.

— Not available.

Sources: Eurostat and Commission of the European Communities.

United States cereals usage

million tonnes

	Wheat			[1]All cereals	
	[2]Food	Seed	Animal feed	[2]Food, alcohol, seed	Animal feed
1979-80	16·6 (3·9)	2·7(0·6)	2·3(0·5)	39·8(3·4)	142·2(12·1)
1980-81	16·6 (3·7)	3·1(0·7)	1·6(0·4)	39·5(3·4)	125·6(10·8)
1981-82	16·4 (3·6)	2·9(0·6)	3·7(0·8)	41·1(3·3)	131·3(10·6)
1982-83	16·7 (3·5)	2·6(0·5)	5·3(1·1)	47·5(3·7)	144·6(11·2)
1983-84	17·5 (3·5)	2·7(0·5)	10·0(2·0)	50·3(4·2)	130·0(10·9)
1984-85	17·7 (3·4)	2·7(0·5)	11·0(2·1)	53·5(4·0)	141·6(10·6)
1985-86	18·4 (3·6)	2·5(0·5)	7·4(1·5)	56·2(4·1	142·5(10·4)
1986-87	19·7 (3·7)	2·3(0·4)	10·5(2·0)	57·6(4·2)	155·9(11·3)
1987-88	19·55(3·8)	2·3(0·5)	7·8(1·5)	58·9(4·4)	153·6(11·6)
1988-89	22·25(4·4)		4·3(0·8)	60·0(4·8)	124·1 (9·9)
1989-90	22·63(4·2)		4·3(0·8)	61·6(4·5)	138·8(10·1)

[1] Covers wheat, maize, barley, oats, sorghum, rye but excludes rice.
[2] No disaggregation between usage for direct human consumption and industrial processes available.

Notes:
Figures in parenthesis are quantities used as percentage of world production. MAFF estimates using FAO data on world production.
Sources: USDA Agricultural Statistics 1989 and Agricultural Outlook, March 1991.

Usage of cereals in Canada

Million tonnes

	Wheat (including durum)			All cereals	
Year	*Food and industrial use*	*Animal feed*	*Seed*	*Food and industrial use*	*Feed, seed and losses*
1979-80	1·9 (0·4)	2·7 (0·6)	1·0 (0·2)	n.a.	n.a.
1980-81	1·8 (0·4)	2·2 (0·5)	1·1 (0·2)	n.a.	n.a.
1981-82	1·9 (0·4)	2·1 (0·5)	1·1 (0·2)	n.a.	n.a.
1982-83	2·0 (0·4)	1·8 (0·4)	1·2 (0·2)	3·6 (0·3)	20·0 (1·6)
1983-84	2·0 (0·4)	2·3 (0·5)	1·2 (0·2)	3·7 (0·3)	20·5 (1·7)
1984-85	2·0 (0·4)	2·0 (0·4)	1·3 (0·3)	3·6 (0·3)	20·1 (1·5)
1985-86	2·1 (0·4)	2·1 (0·4)	1·3 (0·3)	3·9 (0·3)	20·7 (1·5)
1986-87	2·0 (0·4)	2·4 (0·4)	1·1 (0·2)	4·0 (0·3)	21·4 (1·5)
1987-88	2·2 (0·4)	4·5 (0·9)	1·2 (0·2)	4·0 (0·3)	23·9 (1·8)
1988-89	2·2 (0·4)	2·0 (0·4)	1·3 (0·3)	n.a.	n.a.
1989-90	2·3 (0·4)	1·9 (0·4)	1·3 (0·2)	n.a.	n.a.

Notes:
Figures in parenthesis are quantities used as percentage of world production. MAFF estimates using FAO data on world production.
n.a. Not available.
Sources: International Wheat Council and Agriculture Canada.

Water Supplies, Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance scientists from his Department are offering to Kuwait to *(a)* seal off chemicals from bombed chemical plants to prevent them from getting into the water table, *(b)* mitigate the effects of faecal-oral infection from damaged sewerage systems and *(c)* restore irrigation and water course systems damaged by military action in the Gulf war.

Mr. Curry: We have had no requests from Gulf states for assistance with these matters. The requests the Government have received have focused on the priority tasks of tackling oil and atmospheric pollution and we have of course responded urgently and positively by providing manpower, equipment and funds. The Government are also ready to help in identifying appropriate United Kingdom science expertise in relation to Gulf environmental problems.

EC Food Surpluses

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make his policy to ensure that the EC food mountains are redistributed to those in need, particularly in the third world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The European Community sends surplus food as short-term aid to famine areas, but it is often more cost effective to purchase food supplies from sources nearby. In the longer term, food aid is not an effective solution to food shortages, as it can hinder the development of local food production by depressing agricultural markets and increasing demand for imported products. The Government's policy is to supply cash, expertise, machinery and seeds to developing countries in order to improve their ability to feed themselves. The Government are also committed to securing overall reductions in the level of support and protection for Community agriculture, which would be of benefit to development countries.

Manpower Statistics

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the changes in the manpower numbers and manpower costs that are expected for each of the directorate of fisheries research, the sea fisheries inspectorate and the marine environmental protection division, and the reasons for those changes, between 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

	1989-90	1990-91[1]	1991-92[2]
(a) Directorate of fisheries research			
(i) Average staff-in-post	423·5	417	419
(ii) Total pay costs £'000	6,425	7,032	7,736
(b) Sea fisheries inspectorate			
(i) Average staff-in-post	92	96	99
(ii) Total pay costs £'000	1,228	1,401	1,636
(c) Marine environmental protection division			
(i) Average staff-in-post	20	22·5	23
(ii) Total pay costs £'000	327	411	439

[1] Estimate.
[2] Forecast.

Variations in numbers of staff in post in the directorate and inspectorate reflect in the main difficulties in recruitment of staff to fill vacancies. Additional staff were appointed to the marine environmental protection division to ensure effective administration of licensing controls.

Waste (Sea Disposal)

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what cost increase identified in his recent departmental audit will be reflected in increased fees charged for work connected with the licensing of the sea disposal of waste.

Mr. Curry: A departmental audit showed that departmental overhead expenditure had not hitherto been fully reflected in standard departmental costs used in the calculation of all its chargeable operations including licence fees for sea disposal. Necessary changes in central London accommodation also served to increase overheads.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reasons he has for assuming 8 per cent. inflation for the fiscal year 1991-92 when assessing fees charged for work connected with the licensing of the sea disposal of waste.

Mr. Curry: The 8 per cent. figure was not intended to be a forecast of the general rate of inflation over the coming year. It is a planning figure which the Department has used as a realistic estimate of the likely increase in the cost of certain elements, including pay costs, which are included in the calculations of our fees for sea disposal licences.

Nobel House

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reason for moving part of the Ministry from Great Westminster house to Nobel house, including the cost effects of that move.

Mr. Curry: The move of some 1,100 staff of this Ministry from Great Westminster house at the end of 1988 was necessary because the lease had expired and the building was to be demolished. For reasons of working efficiency it was decided that the displaced staff should be rehoused in central London reasonably close to our Whitehall offices. The only suitable accommodation which the PSA were able to provide was in Nobel house and part of the adjacent building, Ergon house.

The costs falling to this Ministry for refurbishment, construction and fitting out of both buildings, which was managed by the PSA, totalled approximately £14 million, with a further £484,000 for IT cabling and £97,000 for removals. Annual accommodation charges increased by some £5 million from the relatively low level the Ministry was paying for poor quality accommodation on a long lease. This is offset to a degree by a significant decrease in maintenance and fuel and utilities costs.

Horticulture Research International

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 21 March, if he will list the sources and amounts of funding of Horticulture Research International; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Horticulture Research International is funded by its annual research commissions with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, grant in aid from the Agricultural and Food Research Council, and research contracts with a range of customers including the United Kingdom horticulture industry. In 1991-92 this funding is expected to amount to some £12·7 million, £3·0 million, and £2·9 million respectively.

Sheep Variable Premium

Sir Michael Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has reached a decision on the future of the sheep variable premium scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The reformed EC sheepmeat regime adopted in 1989 provided for sheep variable premium, which operates in Great Britain only, to be phased out by the end of the 1992 marketing year at the latest. In the negotiations on the review of the regime the United Kingdom secured the right to end the scheme before that date. Last summer, Ministers decided that variable premium should continue to operate in 1991 but that the arrangements for 1992 should be reviewed early in 1991.

My right hon. Friend and I have now carried out that review, taking account of the views of interested parties. In the light of comments received and the experience of the phasing out process so far, we have concluded that the sheep variable premium should be terminated at the end of the 1991 marketing year.

With the ending of variable premium, support to producers in Great Britain under the sheep regime will switch entirely to the sheep annual premium, which will no longer suffer a reduction to take account of variable premium. At the same time the clawback charge on exports of lamb from Great Britain to the rest of the Community will be abolished. From then on support in Great Britain will be on the same basis as in Northern Ireland and the rest of the European Community with a unified system for calculating sheep premium applying in all member states.

The Government are announcing the end of variable premium well in advance of the effective date to remove uncertainty about the future arrangements and to allow all concerned time to adjust to the new circumstances that will apply from the beginning of the 1992 marketing year. Sheep producers will then have the opportunity and challenges of a more open market. I am sure they will respond with the quality produce which makes British lamb such an excellent product.

Scrapie

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether there is a vaccine available for the prevention of scrapie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Moss: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 25 and 26 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), Parliamentary Secretary in my Department.

Discussion concentrated on the Commission's proposals for the 1991 price fixing. Most member states argued that the agricultural guideline should be increased purportedly to take account of German unification. This would allow for a laxer settlement and temporarily enable the Council to avoid some of the difficult issues. I argued strongly, with support from my Netherlands colleague, that the major problems stemmed from market imbalance in several sectors and that these should be addressed as a matter of urgency, so that a decision fully compatible with the guideline could be reached. The Commission also remained firmly of this view.

I also argued that substantial steps should be taken towards eliminating monetary compensatory amounts by adjusting green currencies, including the full alignment of the rate for the green pound. This is necessary to allow the single market to function effectively and to ensure fair competition between producers and traders in all member states.

I also raised the continuing problem of low-priced imports of soft fruit from eastern Europe. Despite initial hesitations the Commission indicated that they would extend the present safeguard measures until 31 July.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of his departmental investigations into friendly fire incidents between allied troops in the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes, when our investigations are complete.

Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the firms employed to transport by sea, ammunition, explosives and detonators to the Army in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For reasons of operational security it is not the practice to disclose the arrangements for transporting ammunition and similar items to Northern Ireland.

Rainfall

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the measurement of rainfall during the 24 hours at *(a)* Ballycastle district on 27-28 October 1990 and *(b)* Strangford lough area on 5-6 January.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In the 24-hour period starting 0900 on 27 October 1990, 72·8mm of rainfall was recorded at Ballycastle Glenowen and 71·5mm at Ballycastle Magherintemple. In the 24-hour period starting 0900 on 5 January 1991, 12·8mm of rainfall was recorded at Hare island, in the Strangford area.

Territorial Army

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers commanding officers in Territorial Army units have *(a)* currently and *(b)* as envisaged under the new management strategy to appoint and dismiss civilian employees such as secretaries, clerks and storemen; and whether under NMS such commanding officers will be allowed to transfer funds between civilian posts and other options, such as buying secretarial services from an agency.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Currently, commanding officers of Territorial Army units may appoint industrial employees only within complement and funding limits. No powers of dismissal are delegated below rank of Colonel. No change in these personnel management arrangements is planned under NMS, but funds may be transferred by a budget holder between a range of resources to enable a service to be provided in the most efficient manner. Commanding officers of Territorial Army units will not be budget holders under NMS and will not, therefore, have powers to transfer funds.

HMS Endurance

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with regard to the programming and design for the replacement of HMS Endurance; when the relevant studies commenced; and when is it expected that a definitive conclusion will be reached.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Studies into the requirement for replacing HMS Endurance commenced last year and are continuing.

RAF Waddington

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what complaints have been received by the base commander at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire about noise; and what action has been taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Currently RAF Waddington does not house any operational squadrons and therefore receives only occasional noise complaints. Each complaint is dealt with as appropriate to the particular case.

Plymouth (Empty Properties)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's residential properties are empty within the city of Plymouth; for how long they have been empty; and whether he will transfer them to the local authority or housing association for local use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 December 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, 406 married quarters and 11 Ministry of Defence civilian properties in the Plymouth area were vacant. Of the married quarters 29 had been vacant for over a year and 377 for under a year; of the civilian properties seven had been vacant for over six months and four for less than six months. In addition, 275 dwellings were in the process of being sold. Not all empty properties are surplus to requirements, many are either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some are already allotted to service families who are due to move in shortly and others are being considered for disposal. Surplus dwellings are normally offered for sale to service personnel through the services' discount scheme or sold by competitive tender. It is therefore not possible to transfer empty dwellings to local authorities or housing associations.

Nuclear Tests

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department was informed of the leak of Zenon 133 from the nuclear test conducted by the United Kingdom in Nevada in November 1990; what reporting arrangements exist with the United States authorities to inform Her Majesty's Government of radioactive releases from British tests; and what health dangers were posed arising from the leak.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have recently ascertained that there was an extremely minor leak of radioactive gas from the joint UK-US Houston nuclear test carried out at the Nevada test site in November 1990. All information which the MOD receives on such tests is channelled through the United States department of energy in Washington DC. The release posed no danger to the health of people either on or off the site.

Directorate-General of Military Survey

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the directorate-general of military survey is to become a defence support agency as foreshadowed in his statement to the House on 18 October 1989.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The military survey will become a defence support agency (DSA) on 1 April 1991. Its first chief executive will be Major-General R. Wood.

Military survey is an integral part of the Ministry of Defence and will continue to act as the MOD's specialist authority on all geographic support matters, other than hydrographic aspects. Geographic support embraces the provision of maps, surveys and other geographical materials as well as direct support in the field, and technical services and advice, all of which are essential to the capability of the armed forces to plan, train and fight.

The agency will seek to achieve progressive improvements in operational effectiveness, standards of service, quality, cost effectiveness and efficiency. The chief executive has initially been set the following key performance objectives:

Delivery of the programme

1. To meet 95 per cent. of the agreed targets for geographic support commitments, production, development and training in 1991-92 to timescale, quantity and standard.

2. To maintain the operational effectiveness of all military survey units to the required Army standards.

3. To develop and introduce by 1 April 1992:
   (a) improved customer/supplier procedures;
   (b) improved procedures for costing products and services;

and thereafter to meet progressively more demanding annual targets for geographic support, production, development and training for future years to timescale, quantity, standard and cost.

Use of resources

4. To achieve outturn within the agreed annual cash budget allocation, subject to agreed carry over flexibilities.

5. To achieve a 1·5 per cent. increase in efficiency in 1991-92, and to develop plans to achieve future improvements in efficiency which meet targets set by the MOD.

6. To develop and introduce progressively total quality practices designed to improve efficiency in all areas of DSA activity.

Management systems

7. To review the management structure of the agency and to implement appropriate changes by 1 April 1992.

8. To review future requirements for management information and accounting systems and to prepare an implementation plan by 1 April 1992.

9. To produce and develop a corporate plan, and to produce an annual management plan covering year 1 in detail and years 2-4 in outline.

The Gulf

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: We do not intend to retain a permanent ground force capability in the area. The withdrawal of our forces is well under way, and by the end of this week some 28,000 out of 45,000 will have returned to the United Kingdom and Germany. We expect the main withdrawals to be completed by mid-April. Up to 5,000 personnel are being deployed to Saudi Arabia to manage the return of equipment and stores to the United Kingdom and Germany. This is likely to take a number of months to complete. The remaining elements of 4 Brigade are operating as a battlegroup. While their equipment is in the Gulf and we review progress towards a formal ceasefire, we shall deploy some 1,500 personnel to replace those in this battlegroup and take advantage of training opportunities. My expectation is that the battle group will not remain beyond June.

A squadron of GR1 Tornados will also remain in Bahrain for the time being. The Armilla patrol will continue to provide a frigate/destroyer presence in the region; and a number of mine counter-measures vessels will also remain, to contribute to multinational mine clearance operations, for about six months.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 28 March 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General if it is his policy to propose a freeze on the upper limits of capital and income beyond which an applicant is not eligible for legal aid.

The Attorney-General: No. It is not the Lord Chancellor's policy to freeze the upper limits of capital and income for legal aid eligibility. The Lord Chancellor is conducting a full review of the financial conditions for legal aid. The first stage of the review, covering civil, non-matrimonial legal aid is nearing completion. A consultation paper will be issued containing proposals aimed at targeting legal aid to need and final decisions will be made in the light of the response to this paper.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General why West Midlands police officers were taking statements regarding the Birmingham pub bombings case in 1987.

The Attorney-General: The West Midlands police took statements in respect of the Birmingham pub bombings case in 1987 at the request of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animals (Live Exports)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on progress being made in current EC negotiations to maintain adequate control and protection for the exportation of live horses and ponies after 1992;

(2) what further representations he has had on the need to maintain existing controls on the exportation of live horses and ponies after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government continue to receive many representations on this subject. In the Community negotiations, which are still at an early stage, the Government will continue to press for the continuation of controls which prevent the export of horses for slaughter.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he now intends to take prosecutions under the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Prosecutions will be taken under the regulations when appropriate.

Voluntary Organisations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the voluntary organisations to which he has given grant aid, including the amounts given in each case, in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My Department is fully committed to encouraging the work done by the voluntary sector and regularly reviews the grant aid given to voluntary organisations. For 1989-90 and 1990-91 the following organisations benefited by the amounts shown:

	1989-90 £	*1990-91* £
Dartington Institute (Project Silvanus)	11,000	6,250
Farming and Wildlife Trust	16,000	36,000
National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs	18,500	18,962
National Proficiency Tests Council	72,670	115,800
RURAL (Responsible Use of Resources in Agriculture and on the Land)	2,000	2,000

Orange Juice

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries of origin of the orange juice samples which were subjected to laboratory analysis for sugar content; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: It is not possible to list the countries of origin.

The labelling of most of the juices analysed in the recent Ministry survey either stated that the juice came from more than one country or did not indicate the country of origin.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he intends to take against the suppliers of the orange juice found to breach the Fruit Juice and Nectar Regulations 1977; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The recently reported MAFF survey of orange juice on the United Kingdom market was for surveillance purposes only. Further sampling in compliance with consumer protection law has been carried out, and investigations are continuing.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 13 March, *Official Report*, column 570, whether he intends to exhume the bodies of the BSE-confirmed cattle that were buried in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Eggs

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further plans he has to restrict the import of non-salmonella tested eggs in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: There are no restrictions on imports from other Member States, but all consignments of eggs imported into the United Kingdom are tested for salmonella enteritidis.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Haberdashers' Aske's CTC

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether any conditions for the payment of grants to Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college will be placed on the trustees of the Robert Aske's charity.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *188*, what exact variations from the terms of paragraph 9 of the model CTC/CCTA funding agreement he has included in his agreement to fund the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college;

(2) if he will provide a list of all variations and amendments from the model CTC/CCTA funding agreement placed in the Library on 31 October 1990 which have been included in his agreement to fund the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college.

Mr. Eggar: The agreement between the Secretary of State and the Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College Trust contains a number of minor variations from the model agreement relating to the special circumstances of this project.

In paragraph 1, the entry into force of the agreement is made conditional upon the grant of a 99-year lease to the CTC by the Haberdasher's Company, as trustee of the Robert Aske's charity, in a form to be agreed with the Secretary of State.

Paragraphs 8ii and iii provide that the CTC's contribution to the capital costs of establishing the college shall be the value of a 99-year lease of the site of the Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham boys' and girls' schools, and 8ii incorporates a mechanism for agreeing the value. Paragraph 8v provides for the Secretary of State's share of the actual costs to be reduced by the amount of difference between the cash limit and the actual costs, if the capital costs finally incurred in establishing the CTC are less than the cash limit.

In paragraph 9, the words

"not be expected to exceed the proportion mentioned in paragraph 8iii"

in line 11 of paragraph 9 have been amended to read

"in no circumstances be expected to exceed 80 per cent.".

Similarly, the words

"the first percentage referred to in paragraph 8iii"

in the penultimate line of the same paragraph have been amended to read "80 per cent.".

There are no other changes of substance.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applicants of each sex and from different ethnic groups there were for places in the first year group the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college beginning in September 1991; and how many applicants of either sex and from different ethnic groups have now been offered places at the college.

Mr. Eggar: The college received a total of 830 applications. Of those interviewed, on observation, the ethnic groupings appeared to be:

57 asian
183 afro-caribbean
280 white
47 other.

Of the 90 girls and 90 boys offered places the ethnic groupings, based on the earlier observation, are:

22 asian
40 afro-caribbean
99 white
19 other.

Sports and Arts Foundation

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many meetings, and over what time scale, Ministers and officials from his Department held with representatives of the pools companies to discuss the establishing of a new foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Atkins: No such meetings were held. As the proposals involved a reduction in pool betting duty, the meetings were with Ministers and officials from Her Majesty's Treasury.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what criteria he has applied to decide whether adult education centres run by local authorities should be included in his proposals to change the status of further education colleges so that they come under a funding council; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what criteria he has applied to decide whether colleges of higher education run by local authorities should be included in his proposals to change the status of further education colleges so that they come under a funding council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: As my right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 21 March, the Government propose that all further education colleges offering full-time education should be taken out of local authority control. Most of these colleges make provision for adults, and some offer courses of higher education.

Arrangements for funding and administering education for adults, both within and outside the new sector, will be discussed in the forthcoming White Paper.

Science Budget

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when Her Majesty's Government will be responding to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology report on the science budget 1991-92.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the report and will respond in due course.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has now considered the views expressed by the local authority employers, teacher unions and others on his proposals following the fourth report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: After careful consideration of the representations I have received I have decided to accept the recommendations contained in the fourth report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, but to stage their introduction over the period up to 1 December 1991.

Drafts of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1991, an order which gives effect to this document, and a circular to local education authorities and others, are being sent to the relevant local authority associations, teachers' unions and bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools and grant-maintained schools inviting their comments by Monday 22 April.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Estuaries

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will designate the seven estuaries in Northern Ireland as special protection areas to protect habitats and to safeguard wildlife.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland intends to designate those estuaries which are most significant in terms of their bird populations as special protection areas under the terms of the European Community directive on the conservation of wild birds. Surveying and assessment is proceeding. However, I am not yet in a position to give a precise timetable for the appropriate designations.

Civil Service

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to recruit women and members of ethnic minorities in the top grades of employment at his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: The home civil service and the Northern Ireland civil service are fully committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants including women and ethnic minorities. Both civil services are equal opportunities employers and this is emphasised fully in all the recruiting campaigns and advertising.

If direct recruitment for certain senior posts in the Northern Ireland Office were to be necessary, it would be conducted with guidance from the Civil Service Commission.

Within Northern Ireland itself religion is a more significant equality of opportunity consideration than ethnic origin. Consequently the Northern Ireland civil service commissioners have not taken any specific action to recruit members of ethnic minorities in top grades of employment nor have they any plans to do so. Their advertisements, however, state that applications are welcome for men and women.

Pensioners' Day Centre, Belvoir

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members there are in the Wednesday day centre for pensioners in the community centre at Belvoir estate, Castlereagh borough; how many new members were approved in the past 12 months; how many applications to join the club are under consideration; and what effort is made to make the existence of this club known to pensioners living in Belvoir and district.

Mr. Hanley: At present there are a total of 43 people on the attendance roll of the centre with an average weekly attendance of 39. Five people applied for membership during the last 12 months and three of these have already been placed at the centre and can be offered a place. Two people are currently being considered for membership.

The pensioners in the area are made aware of the club's existence by current members, and social work and community nursing staff. It is also promoted through the East Belfast and Castlereagh Senior Citizens Amalgam.

Social Fund

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each Department of Health and Social Security office in Northern Ireland for the last two years and the current year and how many *(a)* crisis loans and *(b)* budgeting loans were (i) applied for in writing and (ii) applied for, or requested verbally, and in each case (1) refused, or, (2) granted; and how many budgeting loans were paid and how many were offered to applicants in lieu of a crisis loan.

Mr. Hanley: Information about the number of budgeting loans and crisis loans processed each month, the number awarded and the amount paid for each social security office is available in the Library. The number of applications refused can be derived from these figures. Other information about the method of application and the number of loans offered to applicants in lieu of crisis loans is not available.

Ulster Savings

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of Ulster Savings.

Dr. Mawhinney: As part of a programme of policy evaluation a review of Ulster Savings was commissioned in 1989 by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Having given careful consideration to the findings of the review, I have decided that with effect from 1 June 1991 no new investment will be accepted in Ulster Savings although existing investments and provisions for reinvestment will be maintained. The Department for National Savings has agreed that with effect from 1 June it will market national savings certificates in Northern Ireland through the Post Office.

Local Government Finance

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show *(a)* the total amount to be rebated to ratepayers in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the announcement by his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding reduced local government taxation, 19 March, *Official Report*, column 180, *(b)* the average sum for each domestic property in Northern Ireland, *(c)* the sum for each elector in Northern Ireland and *(d)* what sum £140 per elector in Northern Ireland represents.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The total reduction in domestic rates in Northern Ireland is £73·23 million.

(b) This represents an average reduction per ratepayer of approximately £127.

(c) The sum per elector in Northern Ireland is approximately £65.

(d) The sum of £140 per elector in Northern Ireland would amount to £159 million approximately.

With regard to *(c)* and *(d)* it should be noted that there is no precise analogy between the adjustments in Great Britain and Northern Ireland because of the different financing regimes and the markedly different degree of existing central Government support. In neither case is the reduction in the burden of local finance related directly to the number of electors and the above figures are no basis for comparisons.

WALES

Vacant Dwellings

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most recent information for the total number of local authority dwellings which are vacant in Wales; if he will list these for the period of *(a)* under three weeks, *(b)* four to six weeks, *(c)* seven weeks to six months, *(d)* seven months to one year and *(e)* over one year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on 3 December 1990. The following information updates and revises this answer.

Local authority vacant dwellings at 1 April 1990

Welsh districts	*At 1 April 1990*[1]	*Vacant for more than six months*
Aberconwy	23	2
Alyn and Deeside	56	8
Arfon	27	0
Blaenau Gwent	124	2
Brecknock	0	0
Cardiff	293	13
Carmarthen	22	19
Caredigion	31	3
Colwyn	26	0
Cynon Valley	184	44
Delyn	47	7
Dinefwr	29	0
Dwyfor	6	0
Glyndwr	58	0
Islwyn	170	62
Llanelli	109	33
Lliw Valley	46	29
Meirionnydd	7	2
Merthyr Tydfil	106	1
Monmouth	74	0
Montgomeryshire	36	0
Neath	68	1
Newport	96	16
Ogwr	143	0
Port Talbot	291	0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	26	1
Radnorshire	9	0
Rhondda	83	13
Rhuddlan	28	0
Rhymney Valley	64	0
South Pembrokeshire	6	0
Swansea	134	0
Taff Ely	125	0
Torfaen	169	31
Vale of Glamorgan	40	8
Wrexham Maelor	229	25
Ynys Môn	57	7
Wales Total	3,042	327

[1] Calculated using provisional stock estimates for 1 April 1990.

Open Heart Surgery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *177*, when the central collection of statistics on number of open heart surgery cases carried out in Wales was started in the form used in his answer.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Open heart surgery in the NHS in Wales is provided by South Glamorgan health authority. Reflecting the central funding of the authority to provide the service, information on the number of operations carried out has been routinely collected by the Welsh Office since 1984, supplementary to the hospital activity analysis data provided by district health authorities.

Railways

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he has taken to improve the rail infrastructure of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Improvement of rail infrastructure is essentially a matter for British Rail. However, my predecessors and I have given credit approvals to fund capital investment by Mid Glamorgan and South Glamorgan county councils in the valleys rail network.

Health Authorities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of health authorities in Wales have interests in property development and in business generally.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department does not seek information about the commercial interests of members when making appointments. However, the Regional and Distict Health Authorities (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990 require a chairman or member to disclose any pecuniary interest in any contract, proposed contract or other matter under discussion at a meeting and in general preclude the chairman or member from taking any further active part in the related debate or decisions.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much health authority property has been sold in each of the health authorities in Wales in each of the years from 1980 to 1990 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not immediately available in the form requested, but the table details the amount of NHS land sold in each DHA from 1980 to 1990.

NHS land sales 1980-90 (hectares)

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Clwyd	0·4428	—	—	0·3143	0·2040	0·1847	0·1544	0·4943	0·9308	0·3084	—
East Dyfed	—	—	—	—	—	5·0751	0·0250	1·2310	0·2928	0·1640	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·6950	0·0960	0·7141	—	0·118
Gwyneddd	0·0043	—	—	—	0·3908	—	0·0324	—	0·2970	0·1270	0·192
Mid Glamorgan	0·2518	2·9948	—	0·1710	0·5535	1·0328	0·7650	1·2158	0·2343	0·1817	0·270
Powys	11·9892	—	0·2516	0·2734	0·3047	0·0660	—	—	4·4117	—	—
South Glamorgan	—	2·2620	2·3787	2·0697	—	—	0·2466	0·0473	0·0340	—	—
West Glamorgan	3·9510	0·0995	0·2870	0·1615	0·7335	0·2808	—	0·9560	0·0784	4·2040	—
Pembrokeshire	[1]1·3560	[1]37·6372	—	—	—	—	0·0243	0·1644	0·0650	0·0772	0·304
Totals	17·9951	42·9935	2·9173	2·9899	2·1865	6·6394	1·9427	4·2048	7·0581	5·0623	0·884

[1]Disposals by former Dyfed health authority.

Green Belt Legislation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to publish a green belt Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Green belts are established through development plans. The Assembly of Welsh Counties has accepted my invitation to look at the role green belts might play in the planning and development of Wales, as part of the review of strategic planning guidance. I expect to receive a report from the assembly later in the spring, which will inform my consideration of the need to issue further advice on the subject.

Parking Offences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many parking tickets were received and paid by his Department in each year since 1988 in respect of official vehicles.

Mr. David Hunt: One in 1990.

Company Takeovers

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh companies have been bought by European companies and how many by other overseas companies in each of the last two years.

Mr. David Hunt: Information known to Welsh Development International on acquisitions of companies with operations in Wales is as follows: in 1989, four acquisitions by companies based elsewhere in Europe and three by companies based in other countries; in 1990, four acquisitions by companies based elsewhere in Europe and 10 by companies based in other countries.

Environmental Health Officers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many environmental health officers have been employed by local authorities in Wales for each year since 1980.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of local authority non-manual staff employed in environmental health in Wales for each of the last 10 years is given in the table. It is not possible to identify separately the number of environmental health officers included in this category.

Number of non-manual staff employed in environmental health[1] Total Wales

	Numbers
1981	769
1982	748
1983	740
1984	796
1985	856
1986	822
1987	832
1988	826
1989	850
1990	[2]867

[1] Full-time equivalent as at March for each year.
[2] Provisional.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *529-30* whether he intends to exhume the bodies of the BSE confirmed cattle that were buried in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Nurse Gradings

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each health authority area in Wales *(a)* the number of appeals that have been submitted to his Department by nursing staff disputing the grade to which they have been assigned, *(b)* the number of those appeals that have been determined, *(c)* the number of appeals that have been successful, *(d)* the mean median and modal times taken for those appeals to be determined and *(e)* the number of appeals that have been withdrawn.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Relevant numbers of nurse clinical grading appeals made at the all-Wales level to the Welsh appeals committee for each health authority are as shown in the following table:

Health authority	Valid appeals lodged	Appeals subsequently withdrawn	Appeals held	Successful appeals
Clwyd	75	4	12	—
East Dyfed	82	1	8	—
Gwent	258	2	6	3
Gwynedd	288	48	59	16

Health authority	Valid appeals lodged	Appeals subsequently withdrawn	Appeals held	Successful appeals
Mid Glamorgan	180	—	—	—
Pembrokeshire	28	—	—	—
Powys	166	2	19	13
South Glamorgan	200	9	23	—
West Glamorgan	129	1	24	2
WALES TOTALS	1,406	67	151	34

The time taken to process an appeal depends crucially upon the provision of documentation from both staff organisations and management and upon the availability of representatives of both sides to act as panel members. Having regard to postponement and adjournments, the calculation of an average process time would not be meaningful.

Councils (Dissolution)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the subject of the dissolution of Welsh town and community councils; and if he will indicate the nature of those representations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We have received a number of letters expressing concern. Questions have been submitted by hon. Members, and my right hon. Friend has met the hon. Gentleman and representatives of the community council associations.

Minor Works Grant

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of persons currently eligible for minor works grant who will lose their eligibility for such grant by virtue of the new poll tax reduction scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not held centrally.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year from 1967-68 to 1991-92 the aggregate grant percentage for rate/revenue support grant.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 14 March 1991 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Information on a consistent basis is not available before 1981-82.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis showing in the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 for each Welsh local authority and for Wales as a whole *(a)* the total standard spending and standard spending assessment, *(b)* the total standard spending and standard spending assessment expressed as pounds per capita, pounds per adult and pounds per community charge unit, *(c)* the community charge required to be levied to finance standard spending assessment, *(d)* the 'long-run' community charge required to be levied to finance standard spending assessment, *(e)* the 'long-run' community charge required to be levied to finance expenditure 1 to 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. below and 1 to 5 and 10 per cent. above standard spending assessment, *(f)* the proportion of expenditure which would be financed by Government grant at each of the spending levels specified in *(e)*, *(g)* the level of expenditure as a proportion of standard spending assessment which would require a zero community charge and *(h)* that level of expenditure as a percentage of standard spending assessment which would require a zero 'long-run' community charge.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

A465

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current planned date for commencement for the A465 scheme between Aberdulais and Glynneath.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The 1991 supplement to "Roads in Wales" published in February shows the scheme as planned to start in the short term, that is, before April 1994.

Earlswood Roundabout, Swansea

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when and what short-term measures are to be introduced to deal with the long delays experienced by traffic leaving Swansea at the Earlswood roundabout.

Mr. David Hunt: Delays due to the construction of the Earlswood to Lonlas section of the M4 have now been overcome. Earlswood roundabout itself is, however, a source of delay and it is being kept under study in conjunction with the Baglan and Briton Ferry roundabouts, which have already been improved.

It is intended that by 1993 Earlswood roundabout will have part-time traffic signals and will be redesigned to provide better traffic flow.

Youth Training

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level and quality of youth training opportunities in Rhymney valley.

Mr. David Hunt: It is the responsibility of the Mid Glamorgan training and enterprise council to ensure that good quality youth training opportunities are provided at a level sufficient for the needs and circumstances of the Rhymney valley.

Prince of Wales Hospital, Rhydlafar

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the effect of the closure of the children's ward at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, Cardiff, on the quality of facilities and treatment for children with orthopaedic ailments in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: South Glamorgan health authority has assured my right hon. Friend that the transfer of the children's orthopaedic facility at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, to the Cardiff royal infirmary should enhance the service available to children in Wales. It points out that the infirmary is the main centre for trauma and orthopaedic care in the district. As such, it has a supporting academic department, and on-site access to a wide range of support and diagnostic facilities, including the most modern body-scanning technology in Wales.

The health authority also emphasise the benefits, in safety terms, of having anaesthetic cover and emergency services on site.

Furthermore, the children involved will be accommodated in the authority's most recently upgraded and modernised children's ward. This includes a range of cubicles and bedded areas, together with a separate unit for teenagers, a children's play area, purpose-built accommodation for parents and a well-established ward-based educational service.

Benefit Eligibility

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those benefits or grants available to persons in receipt of poll tax benefit by virtue of their eligibility for such benefit.

Mr. David Hunt: The benefits and grants available to persons in receipt of community charge benefit are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Debt Reduction

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage Paris Club members to give positive consideration to the Trinidad terms.

Mrs. Chalker: There is a growing consensus among Government creditors on the need to adopt a more generous treatment for the poorest countries than the maximum one-third debt reduction afforded by the Toronto terms. The need for a stock of debt approach is also increasingly being realised. Her Majesty's Government will continue to urge other creditors to agree quickly to a new treatment containing the most important elements of the United Kingdom proposals, launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as Chancellor, in Trinidad last September.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Stabex replenishment obligations owed by all African, Caribbean and Pacific countries indicating which obligations are covered by the proposed debt reduction scheme put forward by Commissioner Marin.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest figures available from the Commission show the value of all actual and potential reconstitution obligations by the developing countries under Stabex as 899 mecu. (One mecu is worth approximately £0·7 million.)

There are three categories, as follows:

Transfers for which reconstitution requirements have not already been notified	*Mecu*
Jamaica	4·3
Madagascar	0·4
Senegal	49·5
	54·2
Transfers for which reconstitution requirements have not yet been decided by the ACP-EEC council of Ministers	
Congo	7·4
Fiji	2·1
Gabon	5·7
Ghana	25·6
Liberia	7·6
Madagascar	1·7
Senegal	66·1
	116·2
Transfers for which it is not yet possible to determine what proportion would be repayable (which will depend on the trend in prices for the commodities covered, the quantities exported and the competitiveness of the ACP countries	
Cameroon	180·8
Cote d'Ivoire	311·0
Fiji	0·7
Gabon	3·1
Ghana	47·6
Kenya	61·5
Madagascar	5·5
Mauritius	2·9
Papua New Guinea	80·8
Senegal	34·7
	728·6
Total	**899·0**

All of the above transfers are covered by the provision of the proposed debt reduction scheme put forward by Commissioner Marin.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy to encourage greater flexibility in repayments and a reduction of International Monetary Fund and World bank debt.

Mrs. Chalker: All creditors regard the preferred creditor status of the international financial institutions as an integral part of the debt strategy. Flexibility in repayment of arrears to the International Monetary Fund would weaken its liquidity and threaten its financial standing. Any similar move on World bank debt would jeopardise the very favourable terms on which it can currently obtain finance from the market, and therefore increase interest charges to all its borrowers.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage a response from banks on commercial debt comparable to Paris Club action on official debt, as outlined by the Prime Minister, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Trinidad terms speech on 19 September 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: Arrangements for dealing with commercial bank debt must be a matter for the parties to the loans to negotiate between them, but we continue to urge

comparability of treatment between official and commercial debt. We welcome the increasing use of debt reduction in commercial debt deals negotiated under the "Brady initiative".

Ethiopia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he is giving to assistance to the mining industry in Ethiopia.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans at present to give bilateral assistance to the mining industry in Ethiopia. The European Community's programme of development assistance to Ethiopia includes a project at the Lega Dembi goldmine in Sidamo.

Development Education

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the total amount, the percentage of gross national product and the percentage of overseas aid spent on development education by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Governments in 1988 and 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: The information available to the OECD is as follows:

£ million

	Development awareness	*Percentage GNP*	*Percentage oda*
1988			
Australia	0·10667	0·0001	0·02
Austria	0·97122	0·0014	0·61
Belgium	n/a		
Canada	5·10313	0·0019	0·39
Denmark	0·83649	0·0014	0·16
Finland	1·45403	0·0025	0·37
France	n/a	—	—
Germany	2·52069	0·0004	0·09
Ireland	0·37052	0·0023	1·35
Italy	n/a	—	—
Japan	n/a	—	—
Netherlands	n/a	—	—
New Zealand	0·05053	0·0002	0·10
Norway	0·71859	0·0015	0·14
Sweden	2·66104	0·0027	0·26
Switzerland	0·64000	0·0006	0·20
United Kingdom	0·85894	0·0002	0·06
United States of America	n/a		
1989			
Australia	0·34154	0·0002	0·05
Austria	1·14661	0·0015	0·66
Belgium	n/a	—	—
Canada	6·89187	0·0021	0·49
Denmark	n/a	—	—
Finland	0·82946	0·0012	0·19
France	n/a	—	—
Germany	n/a	—	—
Ireland	0·30495	0·0017	1·02
Italy	n/a	—	—
Japan	1·15881	0·0001	0·02
Netherlands	2·12855	0·0016	0·17
New Zealand	n/a	—	—
Norway	2·47009	0·0046	0·44
Sweden	2·52499	0·0022	0·23
Switzerland	0·65869	0·0006	0·19
United Kingdom	0·96364	0·0002	0·06
United States of America	n/a	—	—

These figures may not be strictly comparable given the OECD's widely drawn definition of "development awareness", which could be open to different interpretation by donor countries.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the Overseas Development Administration has spent on development education in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Chalker: Raising awareness in this country of north-south interdependence and development issues is one of the principal objectives of the ODA's public information programme. It features in all ODA publications with a particular focus on schools.

This financial year, for instance, we have provided a grant of £100,000 to the International Broadcasting Trust towards "The Global Environment", a television series which will be broadcast by BBC Schools Television for the next five years.

In addition, specific development education grants are made to a wide range of organisations. Total annual expenditure is:

Financial year	*£*
1978-79	219,000
1979-80	560,000
1980-81	413,000
1981-82	223,000
1982-83	171,000
1983-84	106,000
1984-85	106,000
1985-86	131,000
1986-87	106,000
1987-88	146,000
1988-89	223,000
1989-90	138,000
1990-91	312,000

In addition, the ODA provides an annual grant, currently £100,000, to the Overseas Development Institute for certain information and public awareness activities.

Debt

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing, for the period 1975 to 1990, the total public and private long-term net transfer of financial resources including both principal repayments and interest repayments on public and private debt, between the United Kingdom and all developing countries, with a breakdown of these totals by continent.

Mrs. Chalker: Net official and private flows for the years 1975 to 1989, the most recent year for which figures are available, are:

£ million

Year	*Official flows (net)*	*Private flows (net)*
1975	422	2,520
1976	957	3,503
1977	695	3,208
1978	948	3,916
1979	1,083	5,277
1980	726	4,527
1981	1,265	4,596
1982	1,117	2,463
1983	1,200	2,813

Year	Official flows (net)	Private flows (net)
1984	1,425	2,196
1985	1,495	423
1986	1,417	3,144
1987	1,310	819
1988	1,666	787
1989	1,857	396

The figures are net of principal repayments but not of interest repayments. Data on interest repayments are not available by country.

Refugees

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent initiatives have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to support refugees abroad.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government continue to be a major supporter of the work of international refugee organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. We also provide funding for a large number of British non-governmental organisations working in this field as well as other United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Border Relief Organisation on the Thai/Cambodia border.

In 1990 our refugee assistance overall amounted to some £36·7 million. We expect at least to maintain this level of support in 1991.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to give further support to structural adjustment in Africa under the second phase of the special programme of assistance for sub-Saharan Africa co-ordinated by the World bank.

Mrs. Chalker: Our support for economic reform programmes has been a central aspect of our aid policy in sub-Saharan Africa for several years. We pledged and provided £250 million of bilateral programme aid for the first three-year phase of the special programme of assistance for sub-Saharan Africa (SPA I). We are undertaking to commit up to £300 million bilaterally over the three years 1991-92 to 1993-94 in support of phase II of the special programme (SPA II). These funds will be available to countries selected by Her Majesty's government from among those pursuing economic reform programmes endorsed by the IMF and the IBRD and covered by the SPA.

British funds will be made available alongside funds provided by most bilateral donors and by the key multilateral aid agencies including the World bank, the IMF, the African development bank and the European development fund. Up to 75 per cent. of the United Kingdom bilateral funds will be untied for procurement from developing countries and from donors who are untying a similar or greater proportion of their bilateral contributions to the SPA.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Commonwealth Development Corporation has been authorised to extend its area of operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I have decided to give approval to the CDC undertaking activities in Nicaragua. This is subject to consultation between the CDC and my Department on the scale and content of the CDC's intended investment programme in that country.

PRIME MINISTER

Channel Islands

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Prime Minister how many allegations he has received since the answer given to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), 21 October 1982, *Official Report*, columns *174-75*, about maladministration and injustice in the administration of justice in the Channel Island of Jersey.

The Prime Minister: The number of such allegations made to me or to other members of the United Kingdom Government cannot be determined without disproportionate cost, but the total is known to be small.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what organisational changes he has made in the running of No. 10 Downing street since becoming Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I have made no such changes.

Atomic Energy

Mr. Strang: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to make a one-off top-up donation to the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards budget.

The Prime Minister: The International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards activities are financed from its regular budget to which the United Kingdom contributes annually. When the agency's board of governors discusses the budget for 1991-92, later this year, the United Kingdom will continue to argue that safeguards activities deserve the highest priority. The Government continue to believe that the regular budget is the best way of financing the agency's safeguards activities, rather than by making extra-budgetary payments.

Export Promotion

Ms. Quin: To ask the Prime Minister whether the proposed integration of the export support resources of the Department of Trade and Industry and of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will entail an overall increase in Government expenditure on export promotion; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The formation of the joint directorate, which was recently announced by Ministers, will not have any direct effect on the overall level of Government expenditure on export promotion. It will, however, help to ensure that the considerable volume of

resources available to the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for this work is used as efficiently and effectively as possible in support of United Kingdom businesses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Fiji

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement of the Government's relations with the Fijian Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have good relations with the Government of Fiji.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has made to the Government of Fiji regarding the treatment of trade unionists and other opposition groups in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Foreign Office Ministers have, on several occasions, made the Fiji Government aware of our concern about human rights issues and raised specific cases with Fiji Ministers.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic steps have been taken to ask the interim Government of Fiji to withdraw the constitution promulgated on 25 July 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the position of the British Government as to the entry of Turkey into full membership of the European Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We share the Community consensus that there should be no decisions on EC enlargement until 1993 at least. In the meantime, we are working to strengthen relations between the Community and Turkey within the framework of the existing association agreement.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the support given by the Cyprus Government, including their approval for the use of facilities on the island of Cyprus during the Gulf war.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Cyprus Government offered to make hospital beds available for Gulf war casualties though in the event they were not needed. The Cyprus Government also gave their firm support to the United Nations Security Council resolutons.

As sovereign British territory, the use of the sovereign base areas (SBA) within the terms of the treaty of establishment is a matter for Her Majesty's Government.

The Gulf

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the help given by the Greek Government during the Gulf war.

Mr. Garel-Jones: From the early stages of the crisis, the Greek Government supported the United Nations Security Council resolutions. A frigate, the Limnos, was sent to the Red sea to help with the naval blockade of Iraq. In addition, Greece contributed United States $10 million to EC economic and humanitarian assistance for Egypt, Jordan and Turkey.

Baltic States

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives he has to increase Britain's aid to the Baltic states.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are keen to assist economic reform in the Baltic states. The British Council is increasing its activities in the three Republics, and has recently established new scholarships for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The Baltic states will also become eligible for know-how fund assistance when the fund begins disbursing in April. We are willing to consider new ideas for aid as they arise.

Sri Lanka

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government supports Australian proposals for peace negotiations in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) of 4 March.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Foreign Affairs Council held on 26 March in Luxembourg.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended an informal meeting of EC Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg on 26 March. In a useful discussion of European security and defence my right hon. Friend set out our view that we need to develop the European defence identity by strengthening the WEU with links to both the alliance and the Twelve. They also discussed the situation in Yugoslavia, and issued a statement calling for a peaceful and democratic resolution to that country's constitutional crisis.

Nuclear Facilities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the reasons why the United Kingdom abstained in the vote at the 45th General Assembly of the United Nations concerning the call for the prohibition of military attacks on civil-safeguarded nuclear facilities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In its explanation of vote on the resolution the United Kingdom stated:

"The United Kingdom's policy is to maintain negotiations on this subject in the Conference on Disarmament. In our view operative paragraphs 1 and 4 of L38 are inconsistent with that approach".

(Resolution L38 was entitled "Prohibition of Attacks on Nuclear Facilities".)

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response was made by the United Kingdom to the criticisms made by the Nigerian delegation to the partial test ban treaty amendment conference in New York in January, about the failure of the United Kingdom and its two depositary power partners to meet its obligations under the 1963 partial test ban treaty to achieve a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The head of the UK delegation addressed issues raised by other delegations in his speech to the conference on 11 January which concluded the general debate. He made clear that we continue to observe our obligations under the 1963 treaty through our participation in the conference on disarmament, and that we have a requirement to test for the foreseeable future because of the contribution to deterrence made by nuclear weapons.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy position was expressed by the United Kingdom delegation to the amendment conference of the partial nuclear test ban treaty held in New York in January in response to proposals put forward for a moratorium on nuclear testing worldwide.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The head of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference made clear our position: because our security will depend for the foreseeable future on deterrence based in part on the possession of nuclear weapons, we have a continuing need to test our nuclear weapons to ensure that they remain effective and up to date.

Israel

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *715*, if he will specify the individual actions he has taken in the last 24 months, in pursuance of his continued active support for resolution 242.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have had innumerable contacts with the parties concerned, whether nationally or through the European Community, to discuss measures to further the peace process on the basis of Security Council resolution 242. The United Kingdom has also voted in favour of Security Council resolutions 672, 673 and 681 which reaffirm resolution 242.

"World in Action" Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library *(a)* the transcript and *(b)* the video cassette of the "World in Action" programme broadcast on 25 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have already obtained a video cassette of this programme, but see no need to purchase a transcript.

China

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in implementing the Foreign Compensation (People's Republic of China) (Distribution) Order 1987.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign Compensation Commission, which has been assisted in the performance of administrative tasks by the accountants, Ernst and Young, will on 2 April 1991 begin making payments from the China fund amounting to approximately £25 million, representing 62·25 per cent. of the value assigned to claims, to successful claimants against the fund. These disbursements will exhaust the balance in the fund.

Maritime Military Doctrine

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy regarding participation in seminars on maritime military doctrine with non-NATO nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In accordance with the commitment in the 1990 Vienna document on confidence and security-building measures we shall be participating in the second military doctrine seminar between all CSCE participating states which will be held in Vienna later this year. The agenda for the seminar has yet to be decided, but is likely to allow coverage of a range of conventional arms control issues.

Naval Confidence-building Measures

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards British participation in naval confidence-building measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are a number of global and bilateral measures dealing with naval forces in which Britain participates, including incidents at sea agreements, which contribute to "confidence-building". We continue to keep under review the need for further arrangements in the maritime sphere.

Capital Punishment

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to abolish capital punishment in the Caribbean dependent territories and Bermuda.

Mr. Hurd: In order to be consistent with the position in the United Kingdom where Parliament has expressed a clear view, the British Government consider that the death penalty for murder should be abolished in those dependent territories which elect to remain under the Crown. Following consultations conducted by our Governors with their dependent territory Governments, we shall submit for the approval of Her Majesty the Queen at a forthcoming meeting of the Privy Council an order under which the death penalty for murder in the Caribbean dependent territories will be abolished and a sentence for life imprisonment substituted. The British Government hope that the Government of Bermuda will decide to follow this example as soon as possible.

Immigration

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how long a person who applies for a visa for a three-month visit but is granted one for six months may remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

Visit visas do not specify the length of stay permitted. This is decided by the immigration officer in granting leave at the port of entry. A person granted leave to enter may remain for the period endorsed in the passport.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many husbands have applied from India for settlement visas to join their wives in Britain in each of the last three years; how many have been granted; and how many have been refused.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is given in the table.

Husbands applying in India for an entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom

Number of persons

	Applications			
	Newly received	*Granted*	*Of which, granted on appeal*	*Refused initially*
1988	470	360	50	260
1989	540	400	90	250
1990	560	390	70	330

TRANSPORT

Cyclists

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to promote the use of reflective clothing, effective lights and other precautions by cyclists using the public highway.

Mr. Chope: Our spring child cyclist campaign will include advice on the need for cyclists to take steps to ensure they can be seen by other road users. Advice is also included in the highway code and other road safety material distributed by the Department.

Association of British Travel Agents

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held with representatives of the Association of British Travel Agents about the extension of the air travel reserve fund to cover passengers travelling on scheduled flights and services.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has not held any recent discussions with representatives of the Association of British Travel Agents. However, the president of the association has written to my right hon. and learned Friend confirming the association's support for extending consumer financial protection to scheduled airline passengers. This followed my right hon. and learned Friend's recent request to the Civil Aviation Authority for advice on this issue.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year how many nuclear flasks from *(a)* research reactors and *(b)* nuclear power stations were imported on non-purpose built ships over the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The details of imported shipments of irradiated nuclear fuel using non-purpose built vessels during the last 10 years are as follows:

(a) Research reactors: One flask in 1990; and

(b) Nuclear power stations: 148 flasks over the 10-year period broken down as follows:

Shipment per year

Year	*Total*
1980	29
1981	45
1982	18
1983	26
1984	2
1985	11
1986	8
1987	6
1988	4
1989	16
1990	24

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the ports through which irradiated nuclear fuel from nuclear power stations was imported in 1988 and 1989 and the number of flasks and tonnage of irradiated nuclear fuel imported through each port.

Mr. McLoughlin: The ports through which flasks were imported and the tonnage of irradiated fuel they contained for the years 1988 and 1989 are as follows:

Number of flask movements (tonnage)

Dover 1988	22·79 tonnes)	1989	1,624·41 tonnes)
Goole 1988	Nil	1989	10·56 tonnes)
Immingham 1988	Nil	1989	10·56 tonnes)
Barrow 1988	82 (218·4 tonnes)	1989	89238·1 tonnes)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the ports through which irradiated nuclear fuel from foreign research reactors was imported over the last 10 years and the number of flasks and tonnage of irradiated nuclear fuel imported through each port.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the last 10 years there has been only a single import of irradiated fuel from a foreign research reactor, in 1990 through the port of Felixstowe. The radioactive content was 0·004 tonnes.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the ship used to import irradiated

nuclear fuel from India was purpose built; which port was its point of entry; and what was the route taken to Dounreay.

Mr. McLoughlin: The port of entry for the recent movement of irradiated fuel from India was Felixstowe. Movement from Felixstowe to Dounreay was by road; the route was as follows:
A45—A604—A1(M)/A1—A66—M6—A74/M74—M73/A80—M80—M9—A9—A895/882—836.
The ship used for this journey is classed as a general cargo ship and is registered in India.

Carlisle Bypass

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the consultant's report on the options for the Carlisle bypass to be finished.

Mr. Chope: The consultant's report is expected to be with the Department by the summer of 1992 to allow public consultation to take place in February 1993.

Marine Safety

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average fine in cases where employers in marine and waterways were found guilty of breaches of health and safety legislation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The fines in the successful prosecutions initiated by the Department of Transport on marine occupational health and safety matters since 1980 have varied generally between £50 and £750.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prohibition notices were issued by his Department to marine and waterway employers since 1980.

Mr. McLoughlin: Powers to issue prohibition notices were given to the Department under the Merchant Shipping Act 1984. The total number of prohibition notices issued from that date to the end of 1990 is 78.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many improvement notices were issued by his Department to marine and waterway employers since 1980.

Mr. McLoughlin: Powers to issue improvement notices were given to the Department under the Merchant Shipping Act 1984. The total number of improvement notices issued from that date to the end of 1990 is 210.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions of employers in the marine and waterways sectors for failing to produce safety policies have been undertaken by his Department in the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Employers are required to produce a safety policy under the Merchant Shipping (Health and Safety: General Duties) Regulations 1984. To date there have been no prosecutions for failure to comply with that provision.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for statutory regulation of working time for marine workers; and what steps he is taking to implement International Labour Organisation convention 147 in respect of the regulation of working time for marine workers.

Mr. McLoughlin: Draft regulations together with a draft code of practice on seafarers' hours of work were recently circulated to representative organisations for comment.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes are planned in the way in which statistics on health and safety of marine workers are collected.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation branch is responsible for the collection and recording of accidents to seamen and is in the process of reviewing the system. It is too early to say what changes will be made but the object is to identify the essential factors in an incident and record them in a readily retrievable form.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change the list of possible causes of marine accidents to exclude placing responsibility on victims.

Mr. McLoughlin: No changes are proposed in the existing policy, which is that the apportionment of liability is not the purpose of marine accident investigation. However, to exclude personal fault or error from the possible causative factors would be unrealistic.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy in all accident recording for marine workers for the length of the continuous duty period preceding the accident, the lengths of time away from work available for rest and for continuous sleep, and the arrangements for rest and sleep within the 24-hour cycle for all persons involved to be recorded.

Mr. McLoughlin: Certain information concerning hours worked prior to an accident is already collected. Consideration is being given to whether this aspect needs to be widened to collect more detailed information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many marine surveyors are in post; and what is their establishment.

Mr. McLouglin: A total of 192 marine surveyors are currently in post in the Department against a complement of 204.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many inspections of British and non-British registered ships took place during the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of general inspections of United Kingdom ships and port state control inspections of foreign-registered ships for the years 1983-90 are as follows; equivalent data for earlier years are not available.

Year	*United Kingdom ships*	*Non United Kingdom ships*
1983	581	2,557
1984	587	2,529
1985	731	2,532

Year	United Kingdom ships	Non United Kingdom ships
1986	629	2,788
1987	716	2,122
1988	[1]810	1,831
1989	[1][2]3,342	1,697
1990	[3]n/a	2,087

[1] *Financial* year figures 1988-89 onwards.
[2] Following the Marchioness disaster it was decided to both increase numbers of inspections of United Kingdom ships and revise the statistical basis of their calculation. The figures for 1989-90 reflect this change of policy.
[3] Not available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions of employers in the waterways and marine sectors have been initiated by his Department for health and safety breaches in the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport has initiated 13 successful prosecutions on marine occupational health and safety matters since 1980.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce statutory regulations for working time to all crewed ships regardless of size.

Mr. McLoughlin: The industry is being consulted on the possible introduction of statutory regulations for seafarers' hours of work. The draft regulations circulated recently for comment apply to seagoing United Kingdom ships—other than fishing vessels and pleasure craft, neither of which are included in the International Labour Organisation convention No. 147—and to foreign ships in United Kingdom ports.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Department last made a systematic assessment of the health and safety record of the waterways sector; and where the results of such an assessment were published.

Mr. McLoughlin: The general occupational health and safety of merchant seamen is under continuous assessment but the Department of Transport has made no specific study of the waterways sector. Responsibility for the health and safety of many land-based workers on waterways falls to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish a port safety forum of employers, unions, safety inspectorates, harbourmasters and port authorities to assist in the avoidance of accidents.

Mr. McLoughlin: The National Accident Prevention Committee, run by the British Ports Federation, has provided such a forum for over 25 years.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to transferring the marine inspectorate to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. McLoughlin: Lord Cullen did not recommend any changes in Department of Transport responsibilities under the Merchant Shipping Acts and I am not considering any.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to extend regulations and other legislation, pursuant to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act to cover workers on British-registered ships.

Mr. McLoughlin: It would not be practicable to extend precisely the same health and safety legislation to workers on ships and on land, but it is the Department's policy to provide a level of protection for workers on United Kingdom-registered ships corresponding to that provided for land-based workers.

Official Cars

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many parking tickets were received and paid by his Department in each year since 1988 in respect of official cars.

Mr. Chope: The information readily available records one parking ticket received and paid in 1989 and one in 1990 in respect of official cars operated directly by the Department of Transport.

Motorways

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current average speed of cars on motorways in Great Britain.

Mr. Chope: Data on vehicle speeds are collected by automatic counters as a by-product of the national traffic census. The counters are not placed near bends, hills or junctions and so can measure vehicle speeds only in uncongested conditions. The results do not, therefore, give any indication of overall average journey speeds.

At present, only a limited number of counters are in operation on motorways, but the data so far available suggest that the average speed of cars in 1990 was 73 mph.

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on *(a)* the fatality rate, in terms of distance travelled, and *(b)* the average speed of cars on motorways in Great Britain if the motorway speed limit were to be raised to 80 mph.

Mr. Chope: The relationship between speed, speed limits, accident risk and accident severity are complex and, in the absence of recent experience in the United Kingdom of changing speed limits, difficult to predict. On the basis of overseas experience and, in particular recent changes in speed limits in the United States and Switzerland, an increase in the motorway speed limit to 80 mph might result in an increase in the average free-flow speed of cars and a consequent increase in motorway fatalities.

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the fatality rate, in terms of distance travelled, on motorways in Great Britain for the latest 12-month period available.

Mr. Chope: The most recent data available are for 1989, when there were 228 fatalities on motorways and A(M) roads at an estimated rate of 3·8 fatalities per billion vehicle kilometres.

Stansted Airport Rail Link

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what forecast of usage was used by British Rail when seeking approval of investment in the Stansted airport rail link; and what was the actual usage during the first week of operation.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend has no information on the use of the Stansted express rail link in its first week of operation. My hon. Friend may wish to obtain this from British Rail. The rail service has been planned to accommodate the demand for rail travel associated with the capacity of the first phase of Stansted development, that is, about 2,500 rail passengers each way per day.

Traffic Measures

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the extension of proposed London traffic measures to all metropolitan districts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department has received representations by and on behalf of a number of local authorities outside London for changes to be made to the Road Traffic Bill so that the new, decriminalised parking regime for London can be available elsewhere.

We are considering these representations.

Oil Spillages

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the contingency plans which exist to deal with a major oil spillage in *(a)* the English channel and *(b)* the North sea.

Mr. McLoughlin: Because it is impossible to predict where or when a tanker accident may occur, the Department of Transport's marine pollution control unit's (MPCU) contingency plan for at-sea clean-up consists of highly mobile resources on short-notice standby. These are positioned at various locations around the United Kingdom, from where they can be deployed quickly to the English channel, the North sea or any other part of the UK that might be threatened by a major oil spillage.

The responsibilty for onshore clean-up rests primarily with coastal local authorities. Those bordering the English channel and the North sea all have their own contingency plans for dealing with coastal pollution and can call on advice and specialist resources from the MPCU, which in a major spillage would co-ordinate the onshore response as well as directing offshore operations. This is to ensure that the at-sea and onshore clean-up response is fully integrated.

A list of all directly owned or contracted counter-pollution resources available to the MPCU is held in the Library.

Because of his overall responsibility for co-ordinating Government policy on environmental pollution, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment would be kept closely informed along with other Departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Nature Conservancy Council.

The UK is a contracting party to the multilateral (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK and EC) Bonn agreement for co-operation in dealing with pollution of the North sea by oil or other harmful substances and is a signatory to an Anglo-French joint maritime contingency plan (Mancheplan) for dealing with pollution in the English channel. Both of these international arrangements provide for the provision of assistance, if requested, to help combat major oil spillages.

Resources would also be contracted in from the private sector as needed.

North Tyneside Steam Railway

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to approve the North Tyneside Steam Railway Light Railway Order.

Mr. McLoughlin: The order was approved Wednesday 27 March 1991.

Poynton Bypass

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from British Aerospace plc about the line of route of the proposed A523 Poynton bypass.

Mr. Chope: British Aerospace responded to the public consultation held at the end of 1989. The company supported the principle of a bypass but was concerned about the proximity of the consultation routes to its runway. Discussions with the company are continuing.

M62

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cause of delays in the completion of the work between junctions 12 and 13 of the M62 motorway at Eccles/Worsley.

Mr. Chope: The works have been more extensive than initally thought necessary and in order to keep delays to a minimum in the long term, we are completing all the works required during the present closures.

A45

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions the A45 east and west of Bury St. Edmunds has been the subject of repairs over the past 10 years; what was the reason in the case of each closure between the Westley-Fornham junction and Rookery crossroads; what was the approximate duration and cost of repairs relating to each closure; and when he expects the road to be fully up to standard.

Mr. Chope: From the information available, apart from routine maintenance, there have been eight occasions. These are in the table.

Year	Location	Works	Duration	Cost £
1984-85	Bury bypass bridges	Plane and resurface	Not known	120,580
1986	Rougham to Bury	Reconstruction and resurface	February-June	1·25 million
1986	St. Saviours interchange	Concrete repairs	May-August	140,000
1986-87	Bury to Rougham	Concrete repairs	Not known	500,000
1988	Rougham westwards	Major maintenance	January-June	1·08 million
1988-89	Bury bypass	Concrete repairs	Not known	225,000
1989	Bury bypass bridges	Bridge joints and resurface —lane closures	October-December	42,000
1990-91	Bury bypass	Reconstruction, joint repairs and overlay	October-April	5 million

Once the major maintenance has finished this week the road will be up to current standards.

Child Safety Restraints

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for a new campaign educating drivers about the need for children to wear safety restraints.

Mr. Chope: We shall shortly be launching a campaign to encourage the wearing of seat restraints by both adults and children travelling in the rear seats of cars.

Immingham

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to monitor the development of the port of Immingham to ensure its compliance with undertakings given by the developers to Parliament and to the Government.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. It is not for my Department to monitor developments authorised by private Acts. But I am assured by Associated British Ports that it will provide quarterly information about steam coal imports at Immingham from the arrival of the first ship at the new facilities to 31 December 1985 to the Department of Energy and the House of Commons Library, in accordance with the undertaking given to the Select Committee of the House of Commons during the passage of the Associated British Ports Act 1990.

M62

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when junction 13 of the M62 motorway at Worsley will be reopened.

Mr. Chope: As soon as possible. We shall need to keep the northbound off-slip road closed for some time after the rest of the junction is reopened, while we carry out works on Worsley canal west bridge.

Elderly Drivers

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of elderly people who have given up driving as a result of his Department's campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government recognise the value to older people of maintaining their independence and mobility and have not been running a campaign to encourage them to give up driving. It is, however, important that any driver should notify DVLA if he develops a medical condition which might affect his ability to drive safely. In the year to April 1990 some 32,000 people over the age of 70 gave up driving on medical grounds out of a total of 1·7 million licence holders in this age group.

British Rail (Paddington)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on investment in British Rail services operating out of Paddington.

Mr. Rifkind: I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that I have today approved investment of nearly £50 million in 65 class 165 Networker turbo vehicles. These new diesel multiple units will run on Thames line express services between Paddington and Oxford/Newbury. They will replace the existing loco-hauled trains which are becoming increasingly unreliable and costly to maintain, and bring about considerable improvements in quality of service.

THE ARTS

Richmond Adult College (Exhibition)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has considered an application for an exhibition of paintings from the Richmond upon Thames adult college to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Renton: Yes. I am glad to sponsor "Richmond: The Place—the People" exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Bradford Playhouse

Mr. Madden: To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the proposal by the British Film Institute to transfer funding from the Bradford Playhouse and film theatre to the former Library theatre now owned by the national museum of photography; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have received no representations about this proposal, other than a letter from the hon. Member himself.

Funding

Mr. Madden: To ask the Minister for the Arts how much funding his Department has provided directly or indirectly to the national museum of photography and the British Film Institute over each of the past three years, to date; what is his policy on cross-funding by bodies funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Since 1988 my Department has provided the following funding to the British Film Institute:

	£ million
1988-89	11·30
1989-90	11·90
1990-91	12·75

In each of those years the national museum of science and industry has allocated some 10 per cent. of its grant in aid to the national museum of photography, film and television. The allocation for 1991-92 will amount to some £2 million. Cross-funding by Office of Arts and Libraries-funded bodies may occur, provided they are acting within their respective functions, however defined.

British Film Institute

Mr. Madden: To ask the Minister for the Arts what control he exercises over the decisions by the British Film Institute on the allocation of its budgets; whether he monitors the implications of such decisions; and what reserve powers he has to overturn such decisions.

Mr. Renton: The OAL's relations with its grant-in-aid-funded bodies is on an arm's-length basis. The BFI's proposals for the allocation of its budget are monitored through the annual submissions of its corporate plan.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will call for a report from the board of the British Film Institute on the reasons for the transfer of old funds from the Bradford Playhouse and Film Theatre to the Old Library Theatre Museum of Photography; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no plans to do so.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs and Excise

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to publish the total amount of revenue collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in serious misdeclaration penalties since April 1990 to the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Serious misdeclaration penalty has only been in force since 1 April 1990 and information on penalties imposed will be published in due course in the annual Customs and Excise Board's report.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, in the format of table 21.2.3 of Cm 621, analysing other current local authority expenditure consistent with table 5.8 of Cm 1520.

Mr. Mellor: Data are no longer held in a form which allows separate identification of all the items set out in table 21.2.3 of the 1989 public expenditure White Paper —Cm 621. The available information is shown in the table.

£ million

	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 outturn	1988-89 outturn	1989-90 outturn	1990-91 estimated outturn
Housing benefit						
England	2,645	2,814	2,873	3,048	3,354	3,950
Scotland	280	330	380	398	454	526
Wales	167	182	183	201	214	225
Total	3,092	3,326	3,435	3,647	4,021	4,701
Mandatory students awards						
England	659	675	703	765	838	1,127
Wales	45	46	49	53	60	75
Total	704	722	752	818	898	1,202

Chancery plc

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration the Bank of England banking supervision department has given to Chancery plc's last submissions on capital adequacy; and what decisions it has reached.

Mr. Maples: That is a matter for the Bank of England, but the confidentiality restrictions of part V of the Banking Act 1987 would prohibit the bank from disclosing any such information about an individual institution.

Knitting Patterns

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what reasons underlay his decision to change the VAT status of knitting patterns;

(2) if he will zero-rate for VAT purposes knitting patterns for babywear and children's garments;

(3) what are the reasons for the differing treatment for VAT purposes of individual knitting patterns and knitting patterns presented in a collection.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The law zero-rates books, booklets, brochures, pamphlets and leaflets. Knitting patterns, including those for babywear and children's garments, can therefore be zero-rated only if they fall to be classified under one of these headings. In the past, single or double sheet knitting patterns were accepted as qualifying for zero-rating. However, Customs and Excise have had to review this position in the light of recent decisions by the independent VAT tribunal, that

"A leaflet must be limp, and generally, if not inevitably, on unlaminated paper".

Having obtained legal opinion that these patterns do not in fact qualify for zero-rating, Customs have notified that they should be standard-rated with effect from 1 May 1991.

Sports and Arts Foundation

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for monitoring and accountability of decision making by the proposed new foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Mellor: Suitable arrangements for monitoring and audit are among the conditions that will need to be satisfied before I could agree to a cut in pool betting duty. The most appropriate form for these arrangements will be determined in future discussions with the proposers of the new foundation.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to meet the pools companies to discuss the proposed foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Mellor: I have no immediate plans to meet the pools companies to discuss a proposed foundation for sport and the arts, but officials in the Treasury plan shortly to meet representatives of the companies.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings, and over what time scale, Ministers and officials from his Department held with representatives of the pools companies to discuss the establishing of a new foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Mellor: Before the Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I met representatives of one of the pools companies on 8 March to discuss their proposals to establish a new foundation for sport and the arts. My officials have also held meetings with representatives of the same company.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the time scale involved in establishing the foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Mellor: Providing that a foundation can be established with satisfactory terms and conditions, I would expect it to start operating from the beginning of the 1991-92 football season in August.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what method and criteria will be adopted in deciding the membership of the proposed foundation for sport and the arts;

(2) how many individuals from each of *(a)* the Sports Council, *(b)* the Scottish Sports Council, *(c)* the Sports Council for Wales, *(d)* the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, *(e)* the British Olympic Association, *(f)* the Central Council for Physical Recreation, *(g)* the Department of Education and Science, *(h)* the Arts Council, *(i)* the Pools Promoters Association, *(j)* the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, *(k)* the Association of District Councils, *(l)* the Association of County Councils, *(m)* the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and *(n)* the Association of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland will be included in the membership of the proposed foundation for sport and the arts; and what other organisations will be represented;

(3) what is his estimate of the ratio of funding between sport and the arts by the new foundation for sport and the arts;

(4) how many staff will be employed by the proposed foundation for sport and the arts.

Mr. Mellor: In his Budget statement on 19 March my right hon. Friend announced that he had received a proposal from one of the pools promoters for a new foundation for sport and the arts. The matters raised in the hon. Member's questions, together with a number of others, will need to be determined in future discussions with the proposers of the new foundation.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the pools scheme to benefit the arts and sports will also contribute to museums.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* It will be for the trustees to determine, once the foundation for sport and the arts is established, whether museums will benefit from the funds to be allocated.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to remove VAT from sanitary towels and tampons; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government have no plans to remove VAT from sanitary products or other essential items of personal hygiene. In any case, this would be contrary to EC law.

Mr. Waller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to compensate health authorities for the Budget increase in the standard rate of value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have agreed that in the special case of the health programmes, the additional costs to health authorities should be added to existing provision as a claim against the reserve. This will also apply to comparable expenditure in Scotland and Wales. The increased provision will be granted to the national health service in supplementary estimates for 1991-92 to be presented in due course later in the year.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms were registered for value added tax, were new registrations for value added tax, and ceased to be registered for value added tax, in each year from 1987 to date, in the parliamentary constituencies of *(a)* Tottenham and *(b)* Hornsey and Wood Green.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 25 March 1991]:* The local VAT Office at Enfield covers areas in addition to the constituencies of Tottenham and Hornsey and Wood Green. No distinction is made between businesses registering for the first time and other registrations, for example, a sole proprietor taking on a partner or forming a limited company.

Years End December	*New Registrations*	*Deregistrations*
1987	2,740	2,297
1988	2,816	2,229
1989	3,583	2,367
1990	3,087	2,575

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what resources and how many civil servants for how many days were devoted to Her Majesty's Government's plans to raise value added tax to 17·5 per cent.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* Civil servants provided advice to Ministers on a wide range of subjects during the Budget period. It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the time spent advising on any one particular issue.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates will be the effect on the headline and core rates of inflation on value added tax at 17½ per cent.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* The increase in the standard rate of value added tax from 15 to 17½ per cent. will add 1·1 percentage points to RPI inflation in 1991-92, on the assumption that it is fully passed on to the consumer. But this effect will be more than offset by the Budget measures on the community charge, which will reduce RPI inflation by 1·9 percentage points.

There is no unique measure of underlying inflation. Moreover, as explained in the Government's observations on the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's report on the 1990 Budget, it is helpful when analysing underlying inflation to abstract from once-off changes, such as changes to indirect taxes.

The increase in VAT will have no effect on producer output price inflation. It will have the following effects on measured inflation between April 1991 and March 1992:

add 1·2 percentage points to RPI inflation excluding mortgage interest payments, offset by the Budget reduction in the community charge;

add 1·3 percentage points to RPI inflation excluding mortgage interest payments and community charge;

add 1 percentage point to the increase in the market price GDP deflator.

But these effects are best seen as once-off changes to the price level, associated with switching from community charge to indirect taxes, rather than increases in underlying inflation.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements he is making to allow guest house and hotel proprietors to recoup the increases in value added tax on holidays prebooked and prepaid before the rise from tour operators and by tour operators from their customers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* No special arrangements are necessary. Guest houses and hotel proprietors and tour operators will either be able to use the normal arrangements governing a change of VAT rate or, where appropriate, arrangements under the tour operators' margin scheme. Details are explained in the relevant Customs and Excise public notice and leaflet. To the extent that guest house and hotel proprietors have received payment before 1 April 1991, they will have no additional VAT liability in respect of that payment.

Trade Unions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government policy on recognition of relevant trade unions for the purposes of representation and collective bargaining extends to all Government Departments and, with the exception of GCHQ, to agencies and non-departmental public bodies.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* The Government as employer recognises relevant trade unions where they are representative. The level and extent of recognition is a matter for management discretion.

Petrol Tax

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the tax on petrol would have to be increased to raise the amount equivalent to the community charge necessary to fund local authority spending up to standard assessment.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 27 March 1991]:* As set out in table 6.9 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", the net yield of the community charge in 1991-92 is now forecast to be £7·2 billion. Calculated on a basis consistent with the ready reckoner published in the 1990 autumn statement—table 4·7—an additional yield of £7·2 billion in 1991-92 would require an increase in petrol duties of around 92 per cent. However, this estimate is

subject to considerable uncertainty about the extent to which such a large increase in duties would induce consumers to switch between different categories of expenditure.

Woolwich Building Society

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to public funds of defending the case brought by the Woolwich Equitable Building Society against the Commissioners of Inland Revenue arising from section 40 of the Finance Act 1985.

Mr. Maude: This information is not available. Confidential discussions are taking place between the parties to the action on the subject of costs.

Mortgages

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated effect on the retail prices index of every 1 per cent. decrease in mortgage rates.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A fall of one percentage point in mortgage interest rates would currently reduce the all items retail prices index by approximately 0·5 percentage points.

Banking Regulations

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, following the collapse of Chancery plc, he has any plans to conduct a further review of the United Kingdom banking regulations.

Mr. Maples: No.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria are followed in determining whether persons are fit and proper for the purposes of controlling banking operations.

Mr. Maples: The criteria for determining whether persons are fit and proper for the purposes of controlling banking operations are set out in schedule 3 of the Banking Act 1987 and are explained further in the statement of principles on section 16 of the Act.

Share Shops

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the criteria by which the Treasury will assess proposals for high street share shops; and how these will be integrated into the privatisation programme.

Mr. Maude: We will be looking for share-dealing mechanisms which provide easy access by the small-scale shareholder for buying and selling shares, either on an execution-only basis or with support and advice where customers seek it. The outlets could be shops, counters or other means of local delivery. Applicants could be individual organisations or joint ventures. The operator of the service will need to be able to comply with the regulatory requirements of the Financial Services and other relevant Acts.

If suitable proposals come forward quickly enough, the Government would consider appointing a retail sales manager for the BT share sale to distribute shares through high street outlets.

I am delighted that a good deal of interest has already been expressed in this proposition.

EC Budget

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the net contributions by the United Kingdom to the EC budget for each of the last four quarters.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest estimates for net contributions to the EC budget on a balance of payments basis are:

	£ million
1990	
Q1	353
Q2	694
Q3	542
Q4	887

The figure for the fourth quarter has been revised upwards by £516 million in the light of corrected information which has become available since the press notice on the balance of payments was published by the CSO on 13 March.

This and other revisions will be incorporated in the CSO press notice on the quarterly balance of payments accounts to be published in June.

This revision to the fourth quarter of 1990 does not affect the projection of the invisible balance for January and February 1991 published in the CSO press notice of 25 March, nor does it affect the forecasts of the balance of payments for 1991 published in the FSBR tables 3.1 and 3.5.

Secondary Banks' Collapses

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes there have been in policy on secondary banks' collapses since 1974.

Mr. Maples: Significant improvements have been made to the system of banking supervision under the provisions of the Banking Acts 1979 and 1987. So far as individual cases are concerned, the bank's reaction continues to be determined on a case-by-case basis in the light of all the prevailing circumstances.

VAT

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to compensate health authorities for the Budget increase in the standard rate of value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have agreed that in the special case of the health programmes, the additional costs to health authorities should be added to existing provision as a claim against the reserve. This will also apply to comparable expenditure in Scotland and Wales. The increased provision will be granted to the NHS in supplementary estimates for 1991-92 to be presented in due course later in the year.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the population figures used for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

for the per capita calculations in his answer to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on identifiable public expenditure of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *457-58*, citing data sources and *(b)* the population figures used for England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions for the per capita calculations in the Treasury's note on public expenditure by territory and region in HC 41 of 1990-91, pp. 41-46, citing data sources.

Mr. Mellor: The population figures for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland used for the per capita calculations in the 1990 analysis of identifiable public expenditure and in the updated version of the table on public expenditure by territory and region given in appendix F of the statistical supplement to the autumn statement (Cm 1520) are set out in table 1. The population figures for the regions of England used in the latter analysis are set out in table 2.

Table 1:
Population Data[1] for 1990 Territorial Analysis

Thousands

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
1985-86	47,111·7	5,136·5	2,811·8	1,557·8
1986-87	47,254·5	5,121·0	2,821·0	[2]1,566·8
1987-88	47,406·7	5,112·1	2,836·2	1,575·1
1988-89	47,536·3	5,094·0	2,857·0	1,578·1
1989-90	47,689·4	5,090·7	2,873·1	1,583·0

[1] The data are mid-year population estimates produced by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys. They are consistent with the figures published in Table 2 of Population Trends 62 (Winter 1990)

[2] During the course of the preparation of this reply a minor error has come to light in the figure used (1,556·8) to produce the per capita figures for Northern Ireland for 1986-87. The effect of this is to overstate total Northern Ireland per capita expenditure in that year by £19 (0·6 per cent.)

Table 2:
Population Data[1] for Analysis of Regional Expenditure in England
Thousands

	1987-88
Northern Region	3,076·8
Yorks and Humberside	4,900·2
East Midlands	3,942·3
East Anglia	2,013·7
South East	17,317·6
South West	4,588·4
West Midlands	5,197·7
North West	6,370·1
England	47,406·7

[1] The data are mid-year population estimates produced by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys. They are consistent with the figures published in Table 3 of Population Trends 62 (Winter 1990)

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total weekly income support entitlement for a married man with children aged four and six years if his income is *(a)* £50 per week, *(b)* £130 per week and *(c)* £160 per week.

Mr. Jack: Income support is an inappropriate benefit, but my hon. Friend may be interested in the figures with family credit which is a more suitable benefit for the examples. The information is set out in the table. All assumptions are as set out in the published tax benefit model tables. Each family is assumed to live in council property appropriate to its size and to pay estimated average rent and community charge. Average rents are provisional 1991-92 figures and community charge has been assessed at £250 per annum. Any relevant changes announced in the Budget have also been incorporated.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6

	£ per week
Child Benefit	15·50
Assumed rent	25·60
Assumed community charge	9·62

Gross earnings	*Tax*	*National insurance*	*Take home pay*	*Family Credit*	*Rent rebate*	*Community charge benefit*	*Total net income*	*Net income after rent and community charge*
£ per week	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*	*£ per week*
50·00	0·00	1·28	48·72	57·70	16·49	5·59	144·00	108·78
130·00	9·78	8·48	111·74	23·06	0·00	1·34	151·64	116·42
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	9·20	0·00	0·00	156·24	121·02

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details of the number of income support or family income supplement recipients

for each of the years 1979 to 1990 showing, in each case, the number of recipients estimated to be liable to income tax at the date of their previous claim.

Mr. Jack: Information on the number of recipients liable to income tax is not available.

Incomes

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables similar to the tax benefit model table showing the net weekly spending power for each of *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a married couple with no children, *(c)* a couple with a child aged 11 years, *(d)* a couple with two children aged eight and 11 years, *(e)* a couple with three children aged eight, 11 and 15 years, *(f)* a couple with four children aged three, eight, 11 and 15 years with weekly earnings of (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110, (vii) £120, (viii) £130, (ix) £140, (x) £150, (xi) £160, (xii) £170, and (xiii) £180 together with net weekly spending power in the first weeks of unemployment when the individuals concerned are classified as long-term unemployed.

Mr. Jack: The information is set out in the tables. All assumptions are as set out in the published tax benefit model tables. Each family is assumed to live in council property appropriate to its size and to pay estimated average rent and community charge. Average rents are provisional 1991-92 figures and community charge has been assessed at £250 per annum. Any relevant changes announced in the Budget have also been incorporated.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

Single Person

Total net income on income support: £64·73

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £38·69

Gross earnings (£ per week)	*Net income before rent and community charge* (£ per week)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£ per week)
60	72·36	46·32
70	73·85	47·81
80	75·40	49·36
90	78·46	52·42
100	85·06	59·02
110	91·66	65·62
120	98·26	72·22
130	104·86	78·82
140	111·46	85·42
150	118·06	92·02
160	124·66	98·62
170	131·26	105·22
180	137·86	111·82

Married couple with no children

Total net income on income support: £91·18

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £60·33

Gross earnings (£ per week)	*Net income before rent and community charge* (£ per week)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£ per week)
60	86·75	55·90
70	95·85	65·00
80	101·93	71·08
90	103·75	72·90
100	105·11	74·26
110	106·43	75·58
120	107·90	77·05
130	113·51	82·66
140	119·12	88·27
150	124·94	94·09
160	131·54	100·69
170	138·14	107·29
180	144·74	113·89

Married couple with one child aged 11

Total net income on income support: £123·93

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £90·88

Gross earnings (£ per week)	*Net income before rent and community charge* (£ per week)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£ per week)
60	135·98	102·93
70	137·14	104·09
80	137·69	104·64
90	138·23	105·18
100	138·65	105·60
110	139·05	106·00
120	139·94	106·89
130	141·63	108·58
140	143·31	110·26
150	144·99	111·94
160	146·68	113·63
170	148·36	115·31
180	152·99	119·94

Married couple with two children aged 8 and 11

Total net income on income support: £142·30

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £107·08

Gross earnings (£ per week)	*Net income before rent and community charge* (£ per week)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£ per week)
60	152·22	117·00
70	153·38	118·16
80	153·93	118·71
90	154·47	119·25
100	154·89	119·67
110	155·29	120·07
120	156·35	121·13
130	158·04	122·82
140	159·72	124·50
150	161·40	126·18
160	162·64	127·42
170	164·62	129·40
180	166·60	131·38

Married couple with three children aged 8, 11 and 15

Total net income on income support: £164·90

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £129·68

Gross earnings (£ per week)	Net income before rent and community charge (£ per week)	Net income after rent and community charge (£ per week)
60	172·69	137·47
70	173·85	138·63
80	174·40	139·18
90	174·94	139·72
100	175·80	140·58
110	177·48	142·26
120	179·16	143·94
130	180·85	145·63
140	182·03	146·81
150	184·01	148·79
160	185·99	150·77
170	187·97	152·75
180	189·95	154·73

Married couple with four children aged 3, 8, 11 and 15

Total net income on income support: £180·35

Net income after rent and community charge on income support: £145·13

Gross earnings (£ per week)	Net income before rent and community charge (£ per week)	Net income after rent and Community Charge (£ per week)
60	186·76	151·54
70	187·92	152·70
80	188·14	152·92
90	190·46	155·24
100	192·21	156·99
110	193·89	158·67
120	195·57	160·35
130	197·00	161·78
140	198·98	163·76
150	200·96	165·74
160	202·94	167·72
170	204·92	169·70
180	206·90	171·68

Lone Parents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of lone parents and their dependants in November 1979 and November 1990 or the nearest date possible, dependent on receipt of social security benefit or income support and family income or payment; and what was the total number of lone parents and their dependants on the same dates, showing in each case the percentage change since 1979.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table. The latest information available is shown, but the dates vary and the sets of figures are therefore not strictly comparable. The references to social security benefit and family income have been read as supplementary benefit and family income supplement/family credit respectively.

Supplementary benefit/income support[1]

	November 1979	May 1989	Percentage increase
Lone parents	318,000	767,000	141
Dependants	558,000	1,307,000	134

[1] Annual Statistical Enquiries—November 1979 and May 1989. Figures do not include prisoners' partners.

Family income supplement/family credit[2]

	November 1979	July 1990[4]	Percentage increase
Lone parents	42,000	126,000	200
Dependants	73,000	200,000	174

[2] Ten per cent. sample of family income supplement load and 5 per cent. sample of family credit load.

[4] The family credit figure for 1990 shows the position at the end of July.

Total of lone parent families[3]

	November 1979	November 1986	Percentage increase
Lone parents	840,000	1,010,000	20
Dependants	1,400,000	1,600,000	14

[3] Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys—"Population Trends 45" (Autumn 1986) and "Population Trends 55" (Spring 1989).

Benefits and Allowances

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value in real terms, in absolute figures and as a percentage of retirement and other state pensions and all other welfare and national insurance benefits and allowances paid in *(a)* November 1979 and *(b)* November 1990; and what were the actual figures for each benefit in each year.

Miss Widdecombe: The last uprating date for which such calculations were made was April 1990 and I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 28 June 1990 at columns *355-66* and the reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 2 July 1989 at columns *455-56*. The missing figures on the real level of invalidity pension are the same as those for retirement pension given in the earlier answer.

These answers do not cover income-related benefits such as income support. The levels of all income-related benefits payable in November 1979 and 1990 can be found in "Social Security Statistics" for 1980 and 1990 respectively, which are in the Library. Changes over time to the benefit system have rendered increasingly meaningless any attempt to make hypothetical comparisons between what people get now under the various income-related benefits and what they might generally have got under previous schemes.

Personal Pensions

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the 2 per cent. incentive for holders of personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: This year four letters have been received from members of the public about the 2 per cent. incentive. These have mainly been in response to press articles on the subject.

Local Offices

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a breakdown of the national and local benefit agency structure on a constituency basis.

Miss Widdecombe: There are currently no plans to publish a guide containing this information. However,

district office managers will be contacting individual Members in the near future with details of how the boundaries of the district structure relate to their constituencies.

State Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men aged 64 years are receiving a social security benefit; what would be the additional cost of paying them retirement pension; and what would be the cost of providing retirement pension to men aged 64 years not in receipt of any social security benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what effect the £100 million cash limit on the social fund will have on the local and central administration of the fund; and what consideration he gave in fixing it at that level, to the risk of the fund running out of money before the end of the financial year.

Mr. Scott: The social fund has always operated nationally within a net budget, and the setting of a net cash limit now formalises this arrangement. This does not affect the local administration of the social fund where budgets will continue to operate on the basis of gross district budgets. We have no reason to believe that the £100 million net budget will not support the 1991-92 national gross budget of £227·7 million throughout the year.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing district office social fund allocations for 1991-92 and the allocations to the local offices comprised in each district for 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Details of the local office social fund allocations in 1990-91 and the district office allocations for 1991-92 are in the Library. I will write to the hon. Member with details of the local offices covered by each new district office, and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of social fund loans was estimated to be non-recoverable in fixing the fund's cash limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: The expected level of loan recoveries does not affect the social fund's cash limit of £100 million.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the social fund's cash limit for 1991-92 and its estimated net expenditure on discretionary grants and loans for 1990-91, in cash terms and in real terms.

Mr. Scott: The social fund net cash limit for 1991-92 is £100 million. Estimated net expenditure on grants and loans in 1990-91 in cash terms and real terms at 1991-92 prices is as follows:

Loans £ million	*(At 1991-92 prices)*	*Grants £ million*	*(At 1991-92 prices)*
31·4	(33·6 million)	67·1	(71·8 million)

Real terms figures have been calculated using the current GDP deflator and may alter. In any event the social fund budget is based on a number of factors, including the level of gross allocation permitted by expected loan recoveries and is not linked to inflation forecasts.

Carers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what steps he is currently taking to ensure that all payments to carers are made at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Scott: To ensure that all payments to carers are made at the earliest possible date, clearance times for invalid care allowance claims are kept under close and regular scrutiny. Despite claims increasing by 50 per cent. during the period October 1990 to January 1991 compared with the same period last year, the clearance time for the year to date is 38·5 days against a published target of 38 days.

Disability

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what methods of payment will be available to recipients of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* disability working allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: Recipients of both disability living allowance and disability working allowance will normally be able to choose whether to be paid in the form of an order book encashable at a post office, or automated credit transfer direct to a bank or building society account.

Child Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether widowed mothers, including war widows, will benefit from the increase in child benefit in October 1991.

Mr. Jack: It is our intention that the weekly rates of child dependency increases payable with widowed mother's allowance and of war widows' children's allowances, together with other benefits payable in respect of children, will not be affected by the increases in the rates of child benefit to be introduced in October 1991.

Local Offices, Bradford

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary staff are currently employed in the three Bradford offices; and what will be the numbers in each category from April under the district management unit.

Miss Widdecombe: The staffing position in the three Bradford offices on 26 March 1991 was as follows:

	Numbers
Bradford East	
Permanent	113·5
Fixed-term contract	10

	Numbers
Casuals	7
Bradford South	
Permanent	113·5
Fixed-term contract	20
Casuals	11
Bradford West	
Permanent	120·5
Fixed-term contract	21·5
Casuals	12

The staffing position from 1 April 1991 is expected to be as follows:

	Numbers
Bradford East	
Permanent	113·5
Fixed-term contract	4
Bradford South	
Permanent	113·5
Fixed-term contract	18
Casuals	8
Bradford West	
Permanent	119
Fixed-term contract	8
Casuals	4

It is planned to make seven of the fixed-term contract staff permanent throughout the DMU from 1 May 1991.

Direct Payments

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the social security benefits which it is not possible to have paid directly into the claimant's bank account; if he will specify in each case the reason why this facility is not available; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the social security benefits which it is possible to have paid directly into the claimant's bank account; and if he will specify in each case the date when this facility became available.

Miss Widdecombe: The facility for the payment of benefit directly into a bank account is limited to those benefits which are fully computerised.

Pending completion of the Department's computerisation programme, the following benefits are those currently payable by automated credit transfer direct to a bank or building society. Also shown are the dates when that facility was introduced:

	Year
Retirement pension/widows benefit	1982
Child benefit	1983
War pension	1983
Mobility allowance	1983
Attendance allowance	1985
Family credit	1988

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information local benefit offices are required to supply him with in regard to income support payments to residents of private residential or nursing homes.

Miss Widdecombe: Data are collected from the files of a 1 per cent. sample of all income support recipients in each local office. For people in residential care or nursing homes the income support data are the weekly amount in payment.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will conduct research into the effectiveness of the social security system in meeting the financial needs of people with AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Chief Adjudication Officer

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the sixth annual report of the Chief Adjudication Officer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The report is being published today. As last year, it finds considerable variation in standards of adjudication both in the Department of Social Security and the Employment Service, and makes a number of comments and recommendations for improvements. These are being considered, and will be the subject of a formal response in due course.

As the report recognises, the organisational changes currently being undertaken in conjuction with the inauguration of the Benefits Agency next month provide an opportunity to consider the scope for improving adjudication standards through greater specialisation in this work at the level of the new district offices. Although it makes no specific recommendation in this respect, I am arranging for the report's comments to be drawn to the attention of the agency's chief executive.

Community Charges Bill

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the provisions of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill entail any alterations in social security regulations.

Mr. Newton: We will be laying regulations making consequential amendments to the community charge benefit scheme. They will provide that any claim for benefit which is made within 56 days of the receipt of a demand notice reflecting the new levels of community charge can, where appropriate, be backdated to 1 April 1991. The regulations will also revoke the existing rule which prevents community charge benefit being paid if it would amount to less than 50p per week, and make a number of other technical changes.

In view of the urgency the Social Security Advisory Committee has agreed to waive consultation on the regulations, which will be entirely beneficial.

Pensions

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 26 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *304*, what are the figures at constant 1990 prices, retaining his original prices and

earnings assumptions; and if he will also show *(a)* the SERPS entitlement at earnings equal to half the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions in each year at 1990 prices and *(b)* the category A national insurance pension in each year at 1990 prices.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* The information requested on SERPS entitlement is in the table. Figures for the state retirement pension are set out in table 5 1(b) of the October 1990 edition of the DSS "Abstract of Statistics" a copy of which is available in the Library.

Year	[1]*£ per week*	[2]*£ per week*
1978	—	—
1979	2·95	1·20
1980	5·50	2·30
1981	8·85	3·70
1982	13·05	5·50
1983	17·35	7·30
1984	21·30	8·90
1985	25·20	10·60
1986	29·80	12·60
1987	35·00	14·85
1988	40·20	17·20
1989	44·30	19·05
1990	48·65	21·10
1991	53·20	23·05
1992	57·85	25·05
1993	62·75	27·25
1994	67·65	29·40
1995	72·70	31·60
1996	78·00	34·05
1997	83·25	36·40
1998	88·65	38·85

[1] Weekly amounts of additional pension payable on retirement on 6 April in the stated year (at 1990 prices) with earnings equal to the upper earnings limit.

[2] Weekly amounts of additional pension payable on retirement on 6 April in the stated year (at 1990 prices) with earnings equal to half the upper earnings limit.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage the citizens advice bureaux, SHAC and Shelter to use their grant in aid to give sufficient publicity to the availability of shorthold tenancies and to encourage private landlords to offer such accommodation.

Mr. Yeo: SHAC, Shelter and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux are receiving grant in aid in respect of work to relieve homelessness, part of which will involve advising people who are potentially homeless of the availability of other accommodation, including that in the private rented sector.

NACAB has been closely associated with the Department's continuing campaign to publicise the changes to private renting legislation, most recently with the booklet "Now it's worthwhile being a landlord' in October 1990.

Nitrogen Dioxide

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, columns *14-15*, if he has any plans to establish monitoring stations for nitrogen dioxide levels at Cardiff or Swansea.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's intention to expand the air quality monitoring network was announced in the environment White Paper. A monitoring station will be established in Wales, but the site has yet to be decided.

Limehouse Link

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the mitigation agreement recently signed by the London Docklands development corporation and the contractors of the Limehouse link, Balfour Beatty and Fairclough joint venture, covering delays which occurred early in the project, involved additional payments from the Exchequer.

Mr. Key: No. LDDC had budgeted for potential contractors' claims. The costs of the mitigation agreement will therefore be met from within the corporation's existing resource provision and will not be funded by additional payments from the Exchequer.

Water Pollution (Monitoring)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance notes he has issued to large-scale industry concerning the impending transfer of responsibility for monitoring of water pollution by industry from the National Rivers Authority to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The NRA will continue to be responsible for monitoring and maintenance of water quality in controlled waters, and for discharges to controlled waters from non-prescribed processes. Discharges from prescribed processes will be the progressive responsibility of HMIP, resulting from IPC authorisations given under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

General guidance on standards and monitoring is outlined in the chief inspector's industry sector guidance notes to be published in April. Additional guidance will be given in the process, specific guidance notes to be published at least three months before IPC applications are required. Industry is a consultee to these guidance notes.

The memorandum of understanding between HMIP and the NRA, signed in December 1990, covers agreed procedures for dealing with the HMIP-NRA interface of responsibility for monitoring and enforcement of aqueous discharges from both prescribed and non-prescribed substances to controlled waters.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what value and percentage of capital receipts from the sale of local authority dwellings between 1980 and 1991 was spent each year by local authorities on *(a)* new building, *(b)* repairs and maintenance and *(c)* servicing of debt.

Mr. Yeo: We have no figures on the use of capital receipts from the sale of dwelling houses for these purposes. This is because capital receipts form one element of each authority's pooled capital resources. As from 1 April 1990 authorities have been required to set aside 75 per cent. of capital receipts from the sale of dwellings for debt redemption.

War Games

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether planning permission is required by those seeking to organise war games *(a)* on their own land or *(b)* on open land.

Mr. Yeo: The Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 grants planning permission for the temporary use of any land outside the curtilage of a building for war games, for up to 28 days in any calendar year. Use for more than 28 days requires specific planning permission.

The consultation paper "Planning Controls over Sites of Special Scientific Interest", issued on 13 March, proposes additional safeguards for SSSIs including the withdrawal of permitted development rights for war games. This consultation paper was announced in my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 13 March.

River Severn

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take following the representations he has received on the problems of pollution and flooding along the River Severn.

Mr. Baldry: Water pollution control in England and Wales is primarily the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority. Representations received by my Department about local water quality or pollution problems along the River Severn are referred to the NRA in the first instance. Matters relating to flooding are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much higher the estimated cost, and planned provision for HRAS rent rebate subsidy, in the years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94, would be were it not for the assumed transfer of rental income from the tenants of some councils reducing the estimated and planned cost of that subsidy.

Sir George Young: Under the new arrangements each authority receives sufficient HRA subsidy to meet any deficit on its assumed income and outgoings. The total contributions to rent rebates which local authorities make from their housing accounts are currently estimated to be £195 million in 1990-91 and £311 million in 1991-92. No decisions have yet been made for later years.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department is *(a)* currently sponsoring any research and *(b)* has plans to sponsor future research into methods of the safe destruction and neutralisation of radioactive materials, including wastes.

Mr. Baldry: Research work is currently being carried out into dissolution of plastic materials contaminated with radioactivity. It is likely that the Department of the Environment will continue to fund this work in partnership with industry.

Currently there is no research work being carried out by the Department into the destruction of radioactive materials.

Further Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the amount of standard spending assessment for further education allocated to each local education authority, the principles on which this is allocated, including the formula used for student numbers, and the effect on the standard spending assessment, if any, of income generated by further education colleges.

Mr. Key: The standard spending assessment (SSA) element for post-16 education in 1991-92 is given in the table for each authority. The assessment includes provision for school pupils aged 16 years as well as those in further education. A separate element for further education is not identified. Details of the formula used to calculate this SSA and the overall number of students aged 16 years and over are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) as amended by the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England)—copies of these are in the Library. An estimate of fee and other income received by colleges is taken into account in calculating this element of the education SSA.

1991-92 post 16 education SSA in million

£ million

Authority	*Post-16 SSA*
City and London boroughs	
City of London	0·398
Camden	11·071
Greenwich	13·624
Hackney	17·571
Hammersmith and Fulham	9·577
Islington	13·174
Kensington and Chelsea	6·743
Lambeth	21·862
Lewisham	16·361
Southwark	14·037
Tower Hamlets	12·533
Wandswworth	19·749
Westminster	10·012
Barking and Dagenham	6·784
Barnet	21·339
Bexley	13·085
Brent	27·486
Bromley	17·403
Croydon	23·907
Ealing	23·909
Enfield	19·619
Haringey	20·322
Harrow	15·821
Havering	13·966
Hillingdon	14·408
Hounslow	14·385
Kingston-upon-Thames	9·232

Authority	Post-16 SSA
Merton	10·402
Newham	19·451
Redbridge	16·016
Richmond-upon-Thames	8·654
Sutton	10·127
Waltham Forest	17·085
Greater Manchester Districts	
Bolton	15,818
Bury	10,732
Manchester	29,553
Oldham	14,081
Rochdale	12,358
Salford	12,064
Stockport	18,976
Tameside	12,791
Trafford	13,649
Wigan	19,270
Merseyside Districts	
Knowsley	10,451
Liverpool	34,741
St. Helens	13,898
Sefton	19,250
Wirral	24,003
South Yorkshire Districts	
Barnsley	11,524
Doncaster	17,065
Rotherham	15,341
Sheffield	31,363
Tyne and Wear Districts	
Gateshead	9,717
Newcastle upon Tyne	15,134
North Tyneside	12,037
South Tyneside	9,183
Sunderland	16,319
West Midlands Districts	
Birmingham	74,585
Coventry	18,937
Dudley	17,651
Sandwell	19,930
Solihull	12,968
Walsall	16,304
Wolverhampton	16,631
West Yorkshire Districts	
Bradford	29,682
Calderdale	11,581
Kirklees	27,006
Leeds	38,712
Wakefield	16,302
Shire counties	
Avon	53·574
Bedfordshire	35·648
Berkshire	50·825
Buckinghamshire	45·164
Cambridgeshire	39·729
Cheshire	66·050
Cleveland	35·389
Cornwall	32·207
Cumbria	27·542
Derbyshire	53·101
Devon	57·768
Dorset	32·842
Durham	33·184
East Sussex	36·759
Essex	90·652
Gloucestershire	32·202
Hampshire	101·458
Hereford and Worcester	42·782
Hertfordshire	66·569
Humberside	50·003
Isle of Wight	9·105
Kent	92·536
Lancashire	92·713
Leicestershire	55·843
Lincolnshire	37·423
Norfolk	41·174
Northamptonshire	32·813
Northumberland	16·896
North Yorkshire	47·544
Nottinghamshire	62·532
Oxfordshire	32·809
Shropshire	25·739
Somerset	29·717
Staffordshire	57·376
Suffolk	33·959
Surrey	67·831
Warwickshire	31·287
West Sussex	41·408
Wiltshire	34·554
All purpose authorities	
Isles of Scilly	0·169

Gulf Pollution

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the extent of the ecological damage caused by the deliberate pollution of the Gulf and Kuwait.

Mr. Baldry: Reports available to me indicate that substantial environmental damage has occurred along parts of the coastline of Saudi Arabia between Khafji and the island of Abu Ali as a result of the oil slicks caused by deliberate release of oil into the Gulf. Damage to habitats such as seagrass beds, salt marshes and mangroves which are of particular importance as nursery grounds for fish and shellfish is likely to be severe and it has been estimated that 10,000 to 20,000 bird mortalities have occurred. However, a full picture must await a detailed ecological assessment of the coastline. In addition the most recent surveys show that offshore patches of light and weathered oil are now moving down the Gulf and affecting the coastline of Bahrain and Qatar.

Air emissions from the burning oilfields of Kuwait will also have significant local environmental effects through reduced sunlight, heat and isolated cases of acid deposition equivalent to the worst cases experienced in Europe in recent years.

Among the international experts and organisations seeking to assist the Gulf states in responding to these problems, the United Nations Environment Programme has now put in hand a programme for a more comprehensive assessment of environmental damage arising from the Gulf conflict which also draws on the expertise of the other United Nations agencies concerned.

British Waterways

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the attempts by British Waterways to sell property in advance of the

British Waterways Bill being enacted; and if he will instruct the board of this organisation to refrain from the sale of any property which would relieve British Waterways of the responsibility which that measure would create.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the British Waterways Board (BWB) is proposing to sell at auction on 27 March some 60 properties as part of a programme of sale of low-income-yielding properties. The day-to-day responsibility for management of its property assets rests entirely with the BWB and the sale is in line with the integrated business strategy endorsed by the Government in February 1990.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will request British Waterways to refrain from extensive sale of the properties before the new management strategy has been completed and entered effective operation.

Mr. Baldry: The sale of surplus properties by the British Waterways Board is entirely consistent with the board's objectives and the integrated business strategy endorsed by the Government last year. Receipts help provide waterway improvements and thereby enhance the network for the benefit of all users.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what changes to existing compulsory competitive tendering practice he is considering in order to implement the measures indicated in his statement to the House of 21 March, *Official Report*, column 402;

(2) when he intends to introduce further local authority services into the scope of compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he plans to consult local authorities over his proposals to extend the scope of compulsory competitive tendering under the Local Government Act 1988 into housing management, legal services and computer services, as indicated in his statement in the House of 21 March, *Official Report*, column 402; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, will be looking at further local authority services to which competitive tendering could be applied. If further services are brought within the scope of the competitive tendering provisions of the Local Government Act 1988, consultation of local government representatives is a statutory requirement. If a new statutory framework is proposed, we shall want to take account of the views of local government in taking forward our proposals.

Environmental Health Officers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many environmental health officers have been employed by local authorities in England for each year since 1980.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) gave the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) on 12 March 1991, at column *477*.

Highway Maintenance

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the implications for his Department's current review of finance and structure of local government of his reclassification of expenditure on highway structural maintenance on the primary route network as capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The review will take account of all relevant factors in examining the financial and structural arrangements for local government.

Local Government

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in his review of local government to date, he has considered the introduction of a regional tier of government in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made clear in his statement to the House on 21 March, it seems likely that we shall move to a larger number of unitary authorities in England. The creation of a regional tier of local government does not feature in the Government's thinking.

Community Charge

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the information in his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *171-72*, about local government support and average community charge once the figure for North Devon is available.

Mr. Key: North Devon has set an average community charge of £384 for 1991-92; if Parliament enacts the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill, the new average charge will be £140 lower.

Estuaries

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many estuaries in England and Wales development or destruction is proceeding at a pace which he estimates is likely to damage the ecological character of those areas; and in how many of these their national or international obligation is to secure meaningful environmental protection.

Mr. Baldry: The Nature Conservancy Council's report "Nature Conservation and Estuaries in Great Britain" provides details of the main nature conservation interests of estuaries and the requirements to protect them. The report, which was published on 25 March, will be placed in the Library.

Air and Water Pollution

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the measures his Department will take to implement the EC Council of Environment Ministers directive of 18 March regarding *(a)* strict limits to toxic gas emissions by lorries and buses from 2 July 1992 and *(b)* the protection of urban towns with populations of more than 2,000 people from polluted waters by the year 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The first part of the question is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. As regards the second, member states are required to draw up programmes to implement the municipal waste water treatment directive by 31 December 1993, and these are currently under discussion with interested parties.

Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for consulting with non-government development organisations in the preparatory process for the United Nations conference on the environment and development to be held in Brazil in 1992.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 10 December 1990 to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) at column *266*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the year on year increase in standard spending assessment of *(a)* Westminster, *(b)* Blyth Valley, *(c)* North Tyneside, *(d)* Wansbeck, *(e)* Castle Morpeth and *(f)* Northumberland county council.

Mr. Key: The percentage increases in standard spending assessments between 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows: *(a)* 22·1, *(b)* 29·6, *(c)* 19·5, *(d)* 29·3, *(e)* 27·2, and *(f)* 18·9.

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the proportion of total local government spending financed by *(a)* the community charge, *(b)* the national non-domestic rate, *(c)* government grants and *(d)* rents and local charges.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* The proportion of budgeted expenditure in 1990-91 financed by the community charge net of community charge benefit and transitional relief is 28 per cent., by non-domestic rates is 29 per cent., and Government grants is 42 per cent., where Government grants comprise revenue support grant, special grants, specific grants in aggregate external finance, community charge benefits and transitional relief grant.

Some 55 per cent. of housing revenue account expenditure is financed by central Government subsidies (including rent rebates), 40 per cent. from rents borne by tenants (excluding rent rebates), with the remainder from other income and balances.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the total sum *(a)* he expects to be raised in England from the community charge in the year 1991-92 and *(b)* raised by domestic rates in the year 1989-90, together with the percentage increase or decrease in the rates required to raise the sums raised in *(a)* above.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 27 March 1991]:* Local authorities have budgeted to raise £13·5 billion from community charges in 1991-92, but this is expected to be reduced to £8·7 billion by the proposed community charge grant. After taking account of the community charge reduction scheme and community charge benefits, community charge income is likely to be about £6·4 billion.

Domestic rate yield in 1989-90 is provisionally estimated at £9·8 billion; net of domestic rate rebates, the yield is £8·6 billion.

The decrease in rate yield required to raise £8·7 billion is 11·5 per cent. After taking into account the community charge reduction scheme and community charge benefits/rates rebates, the decrease is 25·0 per cent.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for England the percentage of local government net expenditure contributed by *(a)* central Government, *(b)* industrial and commercial rates and *(c)* domestic rates in the year 1978-79, and of (i) central Government, (ii) uniform business rate and (iii) the estimated community charge income for the year 1991-92.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 27 March 1991]:* In 1978-79 central Government contributed 58 per cent. of net expenditure through rate support grant and rate rebate grants. Non-domestic rates contributed 24 per cent. (of which commerce and industrial rates accounted for 20 per cent.), and domestic rates (net of domestic rate rebates) accounted for 17 per cent.

In 1991-92 central Government grants, including revenue support grant, community charge grant, area protection and inner London education grants, and community charge reduction scheme grant, are expected to account for 47 per cent. of net revenue expenditure (equivalent to the sum of standard spending assessments); receipts from the non-domestic rates pool account for a further 34 per cent.; and community charges (net of community charge benefit and CCRS) for 18 per cent.

Figures do not add to 100 per cent. because some expenditure is financed from reserves.

Energy and Environment Committee

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when was the last meeting of the standing committee on energy and the environment; what is its present membership; and when he next intends to convene a meeting.

Mr. Baldry: I know of no such committee, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy chairs a ministerial group on energy efficiency whose establishment was announced in the environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance".

House Purchase

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce measures which will protect house purchasers from incurring unreasonable expenses when one party to an informal agreement retracts before contracts are exchanged; and whether he will introduce legislation to require a non-returnable deposit to be paid by both parties to a house purchase contract immediately an offer is made and accepted, and prior to contracts being exchanged.

Mr. Yeo: I have no plans to do so. The law already accommodates several methods of buying and selling property. Buyers and sellers are free to insist on a pre-contract deposit, if they wish, in order to reduce the expenditure wasted when one of the parties withdraws before contracts are exchanged.

Satellite Dish Antennae

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has completed his review of the proposed changes to the regulations covering the siting of satellite dish antennae which was announced following the merger of British Satellite Broadcasting and Sky Television.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have given careful consideration to the implications of the merger. Their concern in originally proposing a general permission for two dishes per dwelling house was to ensure fair competition between major operators in the satellite broadcasting field. In the circumstances following the merger, they see no immediate case for pressing ahead with a general permission for two dishes.

They propose, therefore, to retain the present general permission for one dish per dwelling house, but to go ahead with the other proposals which they made in November to secure better protection of visual amenity and sensitive areas. A small change is being made to the proposed definition of the size of a dish to bring it into line with current practice in the industry. The necessary amendments to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order will be laid in Parliament shortly. I should however make clear that, should the Independent Television Commission license another significant direct broadcasting by satellite (DBS) provider or should another major satellite service emerge that cannot be received by means of an Astra aerial, they would consider the case for moving back to a general permission for two dishes. They look to the industry to press ahead with technical innovation which will lessen the impact of these dishes on visual amenity.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in relation to development proposals for wind farms and other kinds of renewable energy installations.

Sir George Young: The Government's policy on renewable energy is set out in the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans).

Local planning authorities should keep in mind the Government's policy on renewable sources of energy when preparing their development plans and in considering development proposals for renewable energy installations. In general, the planning system operates on the principle that planning permission should be granted unless the development proposal would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance; and those who decide planning applications and appeals must give clear and well-founded reasons for refusing permission. Within this framework, authorities should pay attention to the desirability of energy sources which do not result in emissions of gases harmful to the environment such as carbon dioxide; such sources of energy should be harnessed wherever practicable. Equally, authorities should pay attention to the need to protect the local environment from damage and any loss of amenity which renewable energy installations may cause. Such loss of amenity may include any noise or smell likely to arise from the installations, and their visual impact on the countryside.

The Departments of Energy and of the Environment and the Welsh Office are preparing planning policy guidance about this for local authorities. I hope that a draft of such guidance will be ready to issue for public

"The Three Graces"

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to decide whether the statue of "The Three Graces", previously at Woburn abbey, is or was part of a listed building.

Sir George Young: In the light of all the available evidence and further legal advice, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that the statue is not part of the listed building. He believes that the question whether the statue is part of a listed building turns on the question whether it was a fixture at the date of listing of the Woburn sculpture gallery in 1961. In deciding that question, he has applied the common law tests—degree of annexation and purpose of annexation. Although absolute certainty is not possible, he considers that the balance of argument is firmly against the statue having been a fixture in 1961.

It follows from my right hon. Friend's decision that the question of listed building enforcement action no longer arises. He has also reconsidered the need for public consultation on the issue of controls over moveable fixtures in listed buildings, as previously envisaged. He is no longer persuaded that separate consultation on this issue is required. He intends, however, to include advice on the matter in forthcoming planning policy guidance. A draft of this guidance (which would replace DoE circular 8/87) will be issued for public consultation later this year.

I have placed in the Library a copy of the letter which has been sent to the solicitors acting for the owners of the statue, setting out in full the basis of my right hon. Friend's decision.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British passports have been issued to foreign nationals in 1987, 1988 and 1989, broken down by year and country of origin.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: United Kingdom passports are issued to British citizens, including those who have been naturalised. British nationals (overseas), British overseas citizens, British subjects and British protected persons. In some cases, passports may be issued to persons who also hold the nationality of another country, but information about dual nationality of this kind is not collected.

Youth Custody

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged below 18 years were held in youth custody in 1990.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 30 June 1990 about 970 sentenced young offenders aged under 18 were held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. Of these, about 820

had been sentenced to detention in a young offender institution, 140 to detention under the Children and Young Persons Act, 1933 and about 10 to detention in default of payment of a fine, compensation order or costs.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of people who were sentenced to youth custody in 1988, 1989 and 1990; and how many *(a)* came from a one-parent family, *(b)* came from a home where there had been a marriage break-up, or *(c)* had no parents.

Mr. John Patten: In England and Wales in 1988, a total of 24,118 offenders were detained in a young offender institution. The figure fell to 19,092 in 1989. Data for 1990 are not yet available. This information is published annually in volumes 1 and 2 of the "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables", copies of which are in the Library. Information is not collected centrally on the family background of these offenders.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average weekly cost of keeping a person in youth custody.

Mrs. Rumbold: The average weekly cost of keeping a person in an open and closed youth establishment in 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available, was £459 and £346 respectively.

Durham Prison

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost per woman inmate in H wing of Durham prison per week.

Mrs. Rumbold: The cost of keeping a woman in H wing of Durham prison is not separately available. The average weekly cost of holding an inmate in Durham prison in 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available, was £260.

Police Officers

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in London have taken early retirement in each of the past five years who have *(a)* been suspended, *(b)* taken extended sick leave or *(c)* were being investigated for any alleged offences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Somali Nationals

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what order applications for entry of Somalians into Britain are processed; and if there is a priority system for urgent cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Somali family reunion applications are processed in order of their receipt in the Home Office. We consider requests for priority only in exceptional cases.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants are working on processing applications of Somalians wishing to join their families in Britain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are 18 civil servants employed in the asylum division engaged among other duties in processing Somali family reunion cases. There are also a small number of entry clearance officers at posts outside Somalia who give some time to this work.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time it takes for applications to be processed for Somalians wishing to enter Britain to be reunited with their families; and what is the longest time for any one case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At present, because of conditions in the Horn of Africa, Somali family reunion applicants may, if they wish, lodge an application through a sponsor in the United Kingdom direct to the Home Office, rather than at a post abroad, as would normally be required. The average time between receipt of an application in the asylum division and a decision is 14 months. The oldest unresolved Somali family reunion application was received on 30 November 1989.

Channel Islands

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Mr. Geoffrey Cooper about the maladministration of justice in the Channel Island of Jersey under his responsibility for the good government of those islands.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Between 1982 and 1987, we received from Mr. Cooper or from two hon. Members on his behalf representations that the United Kingdom Government should intervene in the administration of justice in Jersey, particularly in light of the conduct and outcome of civil litigation there involving Mr. Cooper. As was explained in reply to each such representation, we have found no reason so to intervene.

Parking Offences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parking tickets have been received and paid by his Department in each year since 1988 in respect of official vehicles.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Most fixed penalty notices are served direct on the driver of a vehicle, for payment by the driver in accordance with departmental rules; no record is kept of these. The number of fixed penalty notices to owner in respect of parking offences served on the Home Office was:

1988 — 9
1989 — 8
1990 — 6

These were forwarded to the drivers of the vehicles for them to pay.

In exceptional circumstances, drivers may be reimbursed from official funds; details of such payments are not recorded separately and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the application for British citizenship submitted by Ms. Farhat Yasmin on 16 May 1989, Ref. F190117/2, will be considered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Consideration of the case has now started and a decison will be taken when the necessary inquiries have been completed.

Forensic Science

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Association of Chief Constables concerning the impact of the impending new charging system for Home Office forensic science laboratory work on the efficiency of large scale murder inquiries using *(a)* DNA testing and *(b)* other exhaustive advanced forensic technology.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Discussions have taken place between senior managers in the forensic science service and representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers about the impact of the new charging systems on the full range of services provided for the police by the service. Discussions on specific requests take place locally.

HEALTH

GP Budgets

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the names and addresses of the general practices that will be budget holding from 1 April.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not available centrally. Regional health authorities are announcing details of fund-holding practices in their regions as they approve them.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many practices received the payment of £16,000 to help them prepare for general practitioner fund-holding status;

(2) what has been the total level of grant payments for expenditure by his Department for prospective general practioner fund holders; and what was the amount, if any, paid to practices not becoming fund holders in April.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 19 March 1991]:* The information, based upon estimates available at 25 March, on payments of preparatory allowance to prospective GP fund-holders is provided in the table. These payments have been used by the practices concerned to improve the quality of their management systems, which will be of benefit to patients. A number of those receiving payments in 1990-91 have chosen not to become fundholders from 1 April 1991 but continue to prepare themselves for fund-holding status from April 1992. Information on other payments made to potential fundholders in respect of computer systems is not available as it is not separately identifiable.

GP fundholding preparatory allowance

Region	*Estimated total expenditure 1990-91*	*Number of fundholding units*[1]	*Estimated total expenditure 1990-91—practices withdrawing during preparatory year*	*Number of practices*
Northern	464,000	28	16,000	1
Yorkshire	558,481	34	14,481	3
Trent	438,518	28	26,442	2
East Anglia	157,353	9	41,291	5
North West Thames	396,640	22	44,640	5
North East Thames	186,317	13	Nil	Nil
South East Thames	254,000	15	14,000	1
South West Thames	347,417	21	11,417	2
Wessex	233,200	17	12,412	1
Oxford	401,480	25	68,990	5
South-Western	300,228	20	Nil	Nil
West Midlands	450,000	26	34,000	13
Mersey	335,999	21	Nil	Nil
North-Western	312,754	16	56,754	4
Total	4,372,387	295	324,427	41

[1] Includes practices grouping together to meet list size criteria.

Annual Accounts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* general practitioner fund holders and *(b)* national health service trusts will be obliged to publish annual accounts.

Mr. Waldegrave: General practitioner fund holders are required to submit annual accounts to the family health services authority (FHSA) within six weeks of the end of the financial year. These are included in the FHSA's accounts in summary form, which will be audited by the Audit Commission. The FHSA's accounts, including the summary, are submitted to me. There has never been a requirement that these should be published and I do not propose to introduce such a change.

There is similarly no requirement for national health service trusts to publish annual accounts. However, each national health service trust is required to present its annual report, audited accounts and any report on those accounts made by the auditor at a public meeting which the trust is required to hold in every calendar year except the year in which it becomes operational.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations cover publication of the annual accounts of general practitioner fund holders and national health service trusts.

Mr. Waldegrave: Section 98(2)c of the National Health Service Act 1977 inserted by section 20(2)b of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 requires fund-holding practices to submit their annual accounts to the family health services authority. There is no requirement to publish these accounts.

Similarly, national health service trusts are not required to publish annual accounts. However, under schedule 2, paragraph 7 of the Act and National Health Service Trusts

(Public Meetings) Regulations 1991, SI No. 482, each national health service trust is required to hold a public meeting every year except the one in which it becomes operational, at which it is required to present its annual report, audited accounts and any report on those accounts made by the auditor.

Child Guidance

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response has been made to his Department to a request from the Brixton child guidance unit of Camberwell health authority for support for the Brixton child guidance team.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have made it clear to health and social services authorities in the White Paper "Caring for People" that provision for children with psychological problems is a key component of a proper locally based service for people with a mental illness. There are also important links to be made to the education service. It must be for these authorities to judge what priority they can give to such services in the context of overall local pressure and resources.

I will be responding to the request in similar terms.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with rheumatoid arthritis pay prescription charges; and what would be the annual cost of exempting this group.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available.

Bio Products Laboratory

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the reply of 14 February, *Official Report*, columns *553-54*, if he will list the reasons why the Bio Products Laboratory, as a special health authority, is not being made fully accountable for its income and expenditure; and whether these will be reported.

Mr. Dorrell: The Bio Products Laboratory (BPL) is the manufacturing arm of the Central Blood Laboratory Authority (CBLA). The CBLA is a special health authority which does account for the performance of all parts of the organisation and produces an annual report.

Exhibitions

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to organ transplantation to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 22 to 26 April.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average *(a)* length of service and *(b)* age of speech therapists employed by the health service; and what is the percentage of female speech therapists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The precise information requested is not available centrally. The table shows the largest number of speech therapists employed by the health service in England were in the 25 to 29 age band at 30 September 1989. A total of 98 per cent. of speech therapists in England at 30 September 1989 were female.

Qualified speech therapists in post by age at 30 September 1989 Whole-time equivalents[1] (England)

Age band	Speech therapists
18-20	2
21-24	463
25-29	811
30-34	502
35-39	294
40-44	267
45-49	202
50-54	154
55-59	95
60-64	18
Unknown	4
Total	2,811

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of speech therapists employed by the health service left their employment in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The only centrally available figures are for the year ended 31 March 1989 when there were 480 leavers in England. Of these 301 left the national health service; the remainder moved to other health authorities.

Ambulance Service

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued by the Government regarding the disciplinary procedures to be taken when members of the ambulance service are accused of misconduct; and what provisions exist to ensure that management follow these procedures correctly.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Procedures for dealing with individual disciplinary cases are entirely a matter for the employing authority. Serious matters are handled in accordance with an agreement of the General Whitley Council.

Census

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans for either a statement advertising or a statement on the census form to assure members of the public that information provided in their answers to census questions will not be used to compile registers for any local government tax.

Mr. Dorrell: Personal information from the completed census forms will not be made available to anyone outside the census offices, including those compiling registers for the community charge or any other local charge. It would be against the law to do so. The following message is included in the information leaflet which will be delivered to every household with the census form:

"The information you put on your census form is used only to produce statistics. The Census Offices and their staff are bound by law to make sure that the information you give on your form remains secret and safe. The completed forms will be kept confidential and only used to produce information about the population in general. The Census Offices will not give any information about identified people or households to anyone else, in central government or elsewhere."

Further, each census form contains a personal assurance from the Registrar-General that the answers will be treated in strict confidence and used only to produce statistics.

The census offices are also publicising the message elsewhere, for example, in background leaflets, posters and advertisements.

Southampton General Hospital

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Deparment is to compensate Southampton general hospital for the value added tax required to be paid on the cost of the construction of the children's cancer ward and development unit raised by the Piam Brown Child Cancer Fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The arrangements whereby the NHS could in some circumstances reclaim VAT on construction work ceased in April 1990 and health authorities' resources have been increased to compensate. I understand that the allocations of compensation made by Wessex region included an element to Southampton health authority.

Iraqi Hospitals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the World Health Organisation, UNICEF or the Red Cross about sewage pipes burst under Iraqi hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 27 March.

Access to Health Records Act

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has any plans to give publicity to the coming into force of the Access to Health Records Act on 1 November.

Mr. Dorrell: We have no plans for publicity beyond guidance which the Department will issue to the national health service. This guidance will explain the provisions of the Act and the steps which should be taken to ensure compliance.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has implemented a training programme relating to the coming into force of the Access to Health Records Act 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: No. The Department will issue guidance to the national health service. It will be a matter for individual health authorities to bring this guidance to the attention of their staff and to ensure that it is followed.

Community Care

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications for community care policy of the statement of 21 March by the Secretary of State for the Environment on the funding and structure of local government.

Mr. Waldegrave: Responsibility for managing social services, including the phased introduction of community care between 1 April 1991 and 1 April 1993, will continue to rest with local government.

Middle East

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from medical experts and doctors about the trend in the scale of the epidemic in the middle east.

Mr. Dorrell: None. However, the Department is in touch with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the question of humanitarian assistance to the middle east and Iraq and Kuwait in particular.

Services for the Deaf

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric consultants can communicate in sign language with deaf patients; and where they practice.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the services for which there is supra-regional funding and indicate those which provide services specifically related to deafness.

Mr. Dorrell: The following services will be designated and funded as supra-regional services in 1991-92:

Choriocarcinoma services
Craniofacial services
Heart, heart-lung and lung transplantation
Liver transplantation
Specialised liver services
Neonatal and infant cardiac surgery
Services for primary bone tumours
Spinal injury units
Treatment of retinoblastoma
Treatment of arterio-venous malformations by stereotactic radiosurgery
Psychiatric services for deaf people

The last-named service is the only one which is related specifically to deafness.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the future provision of psychiatric services for the deaf presently provided at Whittingham hospital;

(2) what steps he is taking to resolve the financial position of psychiatric services for the deaf planned for Prestwich hospital.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the representations he has received regarding the re-location of the department of psychiatry for the deaf at Whittingham hospital; and what response he has made.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the right hon. and hon. Members to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 26 March at column *370*.

We have received 10 letters from hon. Members. Officials have also received correspondence from the consultant psychiatrist involved in the provision of the service, and from the principal national organisation representing deaf people.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric departments there are in the United Kingdom which specifically provide for profoundly deaf people and where specialists can communicate with deaf patients in sign language.

Mr. Dorrell: There are psychiatric units which specifically provide for the needs of profoundly deaf people at Whittingham hospital near Preston and Springfield hospital in Wandsworth. It is open to psychiatric units to obtain sign language services where they are needed to communicate with deaf patients.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaf people, reliant on sign language for communication, are *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients in psychiatric hospitals; and how many psychiatric hospitals have patients who are reliant on sign language.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Residential Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to local authorities as to the amount of direct provision of residential care for the elderly they should retain in order to meet their obligations under the National Assistance Act 1948.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The policy guidance "Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond", issued to local authorities in November, made it clear that direct provision of services by local authorities is expected to continue to play an important part in the new mixed economy of care. It also stated that authorities should introduce changes in their service provision at a pace appropriate to their organisation and plans. The extent of direct provision of services is for local authorities to determine having regard to local factors.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has undertaken into the comparative life expectancy of elderly persons in residential establishments as against those living independently in the community.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 15 March at column *707*. The Department has not undertaken research bearing directly on this subject.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he gives to local authorities in respect of the placement of *(a)* elderly persons who have been assessed as financially able to pay the full costs of care provided and *(b)* persons eligible for social security benefits, as between part III accommodation and care home trusts or private homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Decisions about residential placements should follow assessment of the individual's needs and consideration of the range of residential care available, not the financial resources of the individual. As explained in the White Paper "Caring for People", individuals should be able to exercise the maximum possible choice about the home they enter. They should be able to look for a place in a more expensive home if they or their relatives and friends wish and are able to make a contribution towards the cost of care. Social services authorities will be expected to make maximum possible use of independent providers when arranging placements.

Children's Hospital, Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decision has been made by the North Western regional health authority as to whether the new children's hospital planned for Greater Manchester will be allowed to opt out; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The North Western regional health authority has agreed in principle to proceed with a children's tertiary referral centre with St. Mary's hospital, central Manchester, as the preferred location. No firm decision on the timing of the development has been made.

If this goes ahead, there are a number of possibilities: the centre may form part of Manchester central Hospitals and Community Care National Health Service Trust; remain a directly managed unit; or seek to become a trust in its own right.

Eye Operations

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many eye cataract operations were carried out within the national health service in the years 1978-79 and 1989-90; and what was the success rate for each year.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities in England reported that 92,244 cataract operations were carried out in the year 1989-90. The figure for 1979 was 39,700. Information on the outcome of cataract operations is not held centrally.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current waiting time for an eye cataract operation on the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about waiting times is available by the specialty of intended treatment, not by specific condition.

Prozac

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adverse reaction yellow cards related to Prozac there have been in the last six months.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Committee on Safety of Medicines has received 370 reports of suspected adverse reactions to Prozac in the last six months. A report of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily mean that the reaction was caused by the drug.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his experts last reviewed the safety of the anti-depressant drug Prozac; and what advice they gave regarding the possibility of side effects.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The anti-depressant, Prozac, is a relatively new drug and therefore its safety is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Committee on Safety of Medicines has examined the possibility that Prozac may be

associated with suicidal thoughts or violent behaviour. The committee concluded that the available evidence does not support this hypothesis. The safety of Prozac will be kept under review.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority is given to cervical smear test results of patients with known abnormalities such as cancer.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Department of Health guidance to health authorities on cervical screening states that it is essential that all abnormal smears are followed up. Information on local arrangements is not held centrally.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of people with AIDS in Great Britain at the time the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys was undertaking its research on the prevalence of disability.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Office of Population Censuses and Survey's research was undertaken between 1985 and 1988. Data on AIDS cases are collected by the communicable disease surveillance centre (CDSC) and communicable disease (Scotland) unit (CD(S)U). The information is as follows:

Year	*Cases reported to CDSC and CD(S)U*	*Known deaths*	*People alive*
1985	393	188	205
1986	848	451	397
1987	1,490	793	697
1988	2,319	1,192	1,127

Oil Wells, Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what equipment has been made available to British troops still in Kuwait and the Kuwaiti Government for use by Kuwaiti residents to protect against the hydrocarbons released from the burning oil wells.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

No equipments have been specifically requested or provided to protect either British troops or Kuwaitis against smoke from the burning oil wells, although we are continuing to assess the effects of the hydrocarbons being released. Further quantitative and qualitative analysis of the longer-term effects from the hydrocarbons released is being undertaken in liaison with the United States and Saudi civilian environmental health officials.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, for employment training, the total number and percentage of trainees with special needs in each of the years 1988-89 and 1989-90 for Great Britain and each of the standard regions plus Scotland and Wales; and if he will provide an estimate of special needs places in 1990-91 and 1991-92 for Great Britain and each of the TEC areas.

Mr. Jackson: Employment training is aimed at long-term unemployed people, many of whom have special training needs. Some groups are identified separately and the table gives details of these groups as a proportion of all starts in 1988-89 and in 1989-90. Actual numbers are not available. No forecasts are available for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Employment training
Special needs groups as a proportion of all entrants

percentage

	1988-89			*1989-90*		
	English as a second language	*People with disabilities*	*Literacy and numeracy need*	*English as a second language*	*People with disabilities*	*Literacy and numeracy needs*
Scotland	[1]	10	11	[1]	9	8
Northern	[1]	9	13	[1]	8	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	[1]	10	16	1	10	14
North West	1	11	15	1	9	12
West Midlands	1	12	23	2	11	18
East Midlands	2	14	19	2	13	16
Wales	[1]	11	21	[1]	12	14
South West	1	15	18	1	14	19
South East	1	15	17	1	13	13
London	2	10	22	5	9	18
Great Britain	1	12	18	1	11	15

[1] Less than 0·5 per cent.
Source: ET Starts Database.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many trainees were on employment training for each of the last 24 months; and what numbers are planned in future.

Mr. Jackson: Numbers in training on ET for the last 24 months are given in the table. Negotiations are still underway with training and enterprise councils in relation to planned numbers of ET trainee weeks and outputs delivered in 1991-92.

Employment training filled places April 1989 to March 1990
April 1990 to March 1991 (estimated)

Month	*Numbers*
1989	
April	185,000
May	189,000

Month	Numbers
June	194,000
July	203,000
August	204,000
September	208,000
October	209,000
November	212,000
December	208,000
1990	
January	207,000
February	209,000
March	210,000
April	210,000
May	208,000
June	199,000
July	191,000
August	185,000
September	184,000
October	190,000
November	194,000
December	199,000
1991	
January	197,000
February	203,000
March	197,000

Source: ET telephone census and Employment Service.

Tourism

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the prospects for the tourist industry in 1991; and what assessment he has made of the percentage change in the proportion of British holidaymakers remaining in the United Kingdom this year.

Mr. Forth: The English tourist board has made no assessment of the proportion of British holidaymakers likely to stay in the United Kingdom this year. Latest available figures show that 79 per cent. of holidays taken by United Kingdom residents in 1989 were spent in the United Kingdom. My Department is giving its full support to the tourist board's "Britain's Great" campaign which is designed to promote holidays at home in 1991. We are also making available an additional £800,000 to the British Tourist Authority to market Britain overseas in the aftermath of the Gulf war.

Marine Safety

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many deaths and serious accidents have taken place among waterways employees during each year since 1980.

Mr. Forth: Injuries to employees arising from inland water transport services, occurring in the years 1986-87 to 1989-90 (provisional), as reported[1] to HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates.

Date of accident[2]	Fatal	Major	Over 3 day
1986-87	—	4	24
1987-88	—	4	44
1988-89	—	5	54
1989-90[3]	1	10	37

[1] Under the Reporting of injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985.
[2] Years commencing 1 April.

Note:—Information for earlier years was reported under different legislation and recorded under a different computerised coding system, not separately identifying the inland waterway sector.
[3] Provisional.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the listed principal causes for deaths and serious accidents of waterways workers.

Mr. Forth: Injuries to employees arising from inland waterway transport support services, occurring in the years 1986-87 to 1989-90[1] (provisional), as reported[2] to HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates.

Kind of Accident	Fatal	Major	Over 3 Day
Contact with moving machinery	—	1	5
Struck by moving including flying/ falling object	—	7	27
Struck by moving vehicle	—	5	2
Strike against something fixed or stationary	—	—	15
Injured while handling, lifting or carrying	—	—	49
Slip, trip or fall on same level	—	1	32
Fall from a height	—	8	17
Drowning or asphyxiation	1	—	—
Other/Not known	—	1	12
Total	1	23	159

[1] Years commencing 1 April
[2] Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985

Information for earlier years was reported under different legislation and recorded under a different computerised coding system, not separately identifying the inland waterway sector.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken to ensure that employers of waterways workers are made fully aware of the importance of employers' safety policies.

Mr. Forth: Section 2(3) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974—HSW—requires every employer of five or more persons to prepare and keep up to date a written statement of his general policy with respect to the health and safety of his employees, and the organisation and arrangements for carrying out that policy and bringing it to the attention of his employees.

During visits to employers of waterways workers engaged in activities for which the Health and Safety Executive—HSE—is the enforcing authority for health and safety legislation, HSE inspectors remind employers of their duties under the HSW Act and pursue their enquiries and any enforcement action to the highest levels where standards of compliance do not measure up to those required.

In addition, the Health and Safety Commission and HSE have published general guidance for employers on the preparation of safety policies.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, following privatisation of ports, he will set up a system to monitor the health and safety of workers on rivers and canals.

Mr. Forth: The privatisation of ports does not affect the legislation already in place which imposes duties on employers, as well as masters and owners of vessels to

ensure the health and safety of workers on rivers and canals. There is therefore no need to set up a further monitoring system.

Work Accidents

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the fatal and serious accident rates of *(a)* waterways workers, *(b)* workers in the steel industry, *(c)* railway workers and *(d)* seamen in each of the last three years.

Mr. Forth: The available information is provided in the tables. Injury numbers in respect of waterways employees in Great Britain are available, but the employment data required for the calculation of injury incidence rates are not.

Incidence rates[1] in respect of injuries to railway employees[2] in Great Britain reported[3,4] to HSC/E enforcing authorities and agencies

	Fatal	Major	Over 3 day	Total
1986-87	7·1	133·0	1,838·0	1,978·1
1987-88	12·2	162·1	1,774·0	1,948·4
1988-89	11·9	231·5	2,501·1	2,744·6

Incidence rates[1] in respect of injuries to employees in the Great Britain metal manufacturing industry[5] reported[3] to HSC/E enforcing authorities and agencies

	Fatal	Major	Over 3 day	Total
1987-88	11·2	301·2	2,430·5	2,742·8
1988-89	6·0	384·5	2,552·9	2,943·4
1989-90	4·1	336·6	2,605·5	2,946·2

Incidence rates[1] in respect of injuries to merchant seamen reported[6] to the Department of Transport

	Fatal[7]	Over 3 day	Total
1987	158·8	2,241·9	2,400·7
1988	52·0	2,404·0	2,456·0
1989	27·6	2,291·3	2,318·9

[1] Rate per 100,000 employees.

[2] Railways defined by Standard Industrial Classification (revised 1980) (SIC80)—Class 71.

[3] As reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurences Regulations, 1985 (RIDDOR) and collected on a financial year basis (years commencing 1 April).

[4] Railway Inspectorate only able to provide data on injuries reported to them between April and December 1989 (9 months). Consequently, the calculation of the provisional 1989-90 annual injury incidence rate is not possible.

[5] Steel industry injuries cannot be separately identified from those occurring in the metal manufacturing industry as a whole. Metal manufacturing is defined by SIC80—Class 22.

[6] Injuries occurring on board, or on access equipment to, all vessels registered in the United Kingdom and as reported under the Merchant Shipping (Safety Officials and Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 1982 (SORADO) and Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1989 and collected on a calendar year basis. This legislation categorises all non-fatal injuries causing over 3 days absence from work as an "over 3 day" injury. Major injuries are not separately classified. Injuries to merchant seamen injured on-shore and therefore falling within the jurisdiction of the HSE, cannot be distinguished from those occurring to dockers and other workers in shore establishments.

[7] The fatal injury incidence rate for 1987 includes the 38 deaths of crew members in the Herald of Free Enterprise Disaster.

[8] Provisional.

Youth Training, Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the closure or planned closure of youth training schemes and places in the Manchester TEC area since that TEC became operational.

Mr. Jackson: Manchester TEC decides on which youth training providers to contract with, taking into account the quality of training offered and value for money.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the provision of special needs youth training in the Manchester TEC area.

Mr. Jackson: I am satisfied that adequate provision is available to meet the needs of all those young people with special training needs in the Manchester training and enterprise council area.

Higher Qualifications

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of people by higher qualifications held, by sex, for Great Britain and each of the standard regions in spring 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Preliminary results are available from the 1990 labour force survey. As they form an extensive set of tables, I will write to the hon. Member giving the information requested.

NACRO, Bradford

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance has been given to TECs on dealing with training providers covering special groups; which National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders—employment training providers will not be funded in 1991-92; how many days' notice of closure was given to Bradford NACRO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils have a contractual requirement to meet the training needs of individuals in certain special groups. It is for TECs to decide in the light of local circumstances with which providers they will contract. My Department does not keep information on the training providers with whom TECs sign contracts or details of their contract negotiations.

Coats Viyella plc

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed takeover of the Tootal Group plc by Coats Viyella on employment levels in the textile industry in Ribbel Valley.

Mr. Jackson: I have made no such assessment.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the average hours worked per week for full-time workers in manufacturing mineral extraction, energy and water industries for each of the countries of the European Community.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is contained in the Eurostat labour force survey results of 1988, table 55, which is in the House of Commons Library.

Single Parents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of *(a)* all mothers with children aged 16 years or under, *(b)* mothers with children aged 16 years and under without working husbands, *(c)* single parent men with children aged 16 years or under and *(d)* single parent women with children aged 16 years or under that area (i) in full-time employment and (ii) in part-time employment.

Mr. Jackson: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Training (Special Needs)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number and percentage of youth training trainees with special needs in 1988-89 and in 1989-90 for Great Britain, Scotland, Wales and each of the standard regions; and if he will provide an estimate of special needs youth training places in 1990-91 and 1991-92 for Great Britain, Scotland, Wales and each standard region and each TEC area.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 4 March 1991]:* The table gives information about those joining youth training for whom special training needs funding is paid for 1989-90. Information is not available for 1988-89 on a comparable basis and no forecasts are available for the years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Youth Training
Number and percentage of YTS entrants receiving special training needs funding in 1989-90

	Number	*Percentage*
Scotland	1,441	4·0
North West	2,770	6·4
Northern	3,192	10·6
Yorks and Humberside	1,465	4·6
West Midlands	1,372	4·3
East Midlands	1,448	4·4
Wales	799	4·4
South West	734	3·6
South East	1,015	3·4
London	2,610	14·2
Great Britain	15,254	5·4

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the total number and percentage of employment training trainees with special needs in 1988-89 and in 1989-90 for Great Britain and each of the standard regions plus Scotland and Wales; and if he will provide an estimate of employment training special needs plans in 1990-91 and 1991-92 for Great Britain and each of the standard regions, plus Scotland and Wales and each of the TEC areas.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 4 March 1991]:* Employment training is aimed at long-term unemployed people many of whom have special training needs. Some groups are indentified separately and the table gives details of these groups as a proportion of all starts in 1988-89 and in 1989-90. Actual numbers are not available. No forecasts are available for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Employment Training
Special needs groups as a proportion of all entrants

Percentage

	1988-89			*1989-90*		
	English as a second language	*People with disabilities*	*Literacy and numeracy need*	*English as a second language*	*People with disabilities*	*Literacy and numeracy need*
Scotland	[1]—	10	11	[1]—	9	8
Northern	[1]—	9	13	[1]—	8	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	[1]—	10	16	1	10	14
North West	1	11	15	1	9	12
West Midlands	1	12	23	2	11	18
East Midlands	2	14	19	2	13	16
Wales	[1]—	11	21	[1]—	12	14
South West	1	15	18	1	14	19
South East	1	15	17	1	13	13
London	2	10	22	5	9	18
Great Britain	1	12	18	1	11	15

[1]— Less than 0·5 per cent.
Source: ET Starts Database.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licences

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) *Official Report*, 25 February, column *353*, how many of the export licence applications refused in 1989 and 1990 were made, respectively, for exports to *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* member countries of the allied coalition in Operation Granby in the Gulf.

Mr. Sainsbury: Refusals of export licence applications in 1990 were as follows:

(a) Iraq—38.

(b) Member countries of the allied coalition—69.

Figures for 1989 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Timeshare

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the current arrangements for regulation of the timeshare industry at home and abroad; and whether he has any plans to change them.

Mr. Leigh: The timeshare industry is subject to the general law of contract and, where appropriate, to existing consumer protection legislation.

Mailshots and award schemes are covered by the codes of practice administered by the Advertising Standards Authority. These codes are voluntary but, where they fail, the Director General of Fair Trading can take action under the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations. He can apply to the courts for an injunction to prevent the publication or continued publication of an advertisement. In some circumstances the Consumer Credit Act may apply. The Trade Descriptions Act would apply if, for example, false statements are made about facilities at a resort.

As I announced on 18 February, I have accepted in principle the recommendations of the Director General of Fair Trading for changes to the Trade Descriptions Act to tighten controls on statements about services and to bring timeshare award schemes within the scope of that Act. They will be dealt with as part of the general review of the Act.

Since most timeshares are located abroad, and much of the selling also takes place abroad, further regulation, to be effective, needs to be at Community level. The Commission has accordingly been made aware of the Government's view that Community action is necessary to implement the Director General of Fair Trading's recommendations for a prospectus for prospective buyers, a cooling off period and protection of deposit moneys.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effects of his Department's policy on the implementation of the reforms of the brewing industry on tenants and licensees of public houses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government have done a considerable amount to improve the position of tenants. In particular, we have enacted the Landlord and Tenant (Licenced Premises) Act 1990 in response to concerns tenants had over security of tenure. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Director General of Fair Trading to assess the effectiveness of the measures introduced following the MMC's report on the supply of beer in late 1993 when they will have had time to take effect. The Secretary of State and I keep in regular contact with the National Licensed Victuallers Association and the brewers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reforms of the brewing industry sought by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 15 March 1991]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), on 27 March, columns *433-4*.

Licensed Trade Tenants

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received from the licensed trade about the position of tenants threatened with eviction by breweries.

Mr. Redwood: Written representations have been received from about 40 tenants of one of the major brewers expressing concern about letters they had received from that brewer informing them that they were likely to be sent "notices to quit" by the summer.

Kuwait

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Taunton of 20 March, what his Department is doing to ensure that appropriate medium-sized and small companies are able to play a part in the reconstruction of Kuwait.

Mr. Sainsbury: Small and medium-sized companies are welcome to register their interest with my Department's Kuwait reconstruction co-ordination team. They will also be in a position to receive information from the British industry task force in Kuwait through the trade associations which are represented on the joint DTI/industry subgroups covering the main sectors of reconstruction work. We see a major role for them in supplying the larger contractors.

In addition to the trade fair programme for the Gulf area it is likely that a number of trade fairs more directly associated with Kuwait will be organised, at which small and medium-sized firms will be expected to participate.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his replies to the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), of 8 March, *Official Report*, column *304*, what interest has been indicated to *(a)* his projects and export division and *(b)* his overseas trade division's Kuwait desk from environmental consultancy companies seeking contracts in Kuwait to provide environmental and ecological restoration.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 March 1991]:* My Department has had approximately 5,000 inquiries from companies seeking work in the reconstruction of Kuwait including a number of environmental consultancy companies. Their details are being entered on to a computerised database, but until this is completed the full information requested will not be easily available. I will write to the hon. Gentleman when I have the information he requested.

Postal Services

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are made by his Department on the efficiency of international postal collections and deliveries to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department makes no such checks. These are operational matters for the Post Office, which regularly monitors the quality of both incoming and outgoing international postal services. I understand that the results of these checks are made available to, and discussed with, the Post Office Users National Council.

Iraq (Exports)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), *Official Report*, 1 March,

column 657, if he will set out the reasons why Iraq is excluded from the list of middle east countries listed; and if he will publish comparable data for exports to Iraq.

Mr. Lilley: My answer on 1 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) did in fact include Iraq in the definition of the middle east. Unfortunately, because of an error, the word "Iraq" did not appear in the *Official Report* but the Editor has been asked by my Department to rectify this for the bound volume.

The table shows the value of exports to Iraq from the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan for the 12 months ending June 1990, the latest 12-month period for which complete information is available.

Exports of goods to Iraq in the 12 months to the end of June 1990

	Millions US dollars
Exports from:	
United Kingdom	696
Federal Republic of Germany	1,119
Japan	491

Source: OECD Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade.

Market Information

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many substantive inquiries were made under the market information inquiries scheme for each month from March 1990 to date;

(2) how many major inquiries were made by businesses under the market information inquiries scheme for each month from March 1990 to date.

Mr. Sainsbury: The table lists the numbers of market information inquiries billed to customers, in the financial year 1989-90 and between April 1990 and February 1991. The list shows the substantial increase in the sales of the service in 1990-91 against those in 1989-90.

	Number	*Value (£)*
1989-90	1,152	94,197
1990-91		
April	215	19,197
May	219	17,752
June	211	16,717
July	216	20,388
August	315	24,148
September	336	25,441
October	378	30,370
November	351	24,357
December	108	9,987
January	701	59,361
February	320	22,033
Total	3,370	269,751

Charges for the market information inquiry service are baanded and are no longer split between "major" and "substantive".

Export Services

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide an update of the figures on export services given in his answer of 22 January 1990, *Official Report*, columns *503-4*.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following figures show gross and net expenditure by the Department on export services[6] in constant price terms:

£ million (1979-80 prices)

Year	*Gross expenditure*	*Net expenditure*
1979-80	25·7	21·2
1980-81	19·5	15·8
1981-82	19·4	15·4
1982-83	21·0	16·6
1983-84	20·8	15·5
1984-85	[1]24·6	[1]18·8
1985-86	[2]24·6	[2]17·4
1986-87	24·6	15·5
1987-88	[3]23·4	[3]14·7
1988-89	[4][5]25·3	[4]16·5
1989-90	[5]23·8	16·6

[1] Expenditure on publicity and promotion was transferred from the COI budget with effect from 1984-85. On a constant price basis, the expenditure amounted to £1·4 million in 1984-85.

[2] Export Intelligence Service revenue was transferred to the exports budget from another DTI budget with effect from 1985-86. On a constant price basis this reduced net expenditure by £0·3 million in 1985-86.

[3] Includes expenditure on publications for the then Statistics and Market Intelligence Library previously treated as part of general library expenditure (value £0·2 million on a constant price basis).

[4] Figures for 1988-89 include grant-in-aid to the International Customs Tariff Bureau (value £0·038 million on a constant price basis), and the "New Products from Britain" service transferred from the FCO in the second half of the year (value £0·2 million on a constant price basis).

[5] Excludes expenditure on British Pavilion for EXPO 92 in Seville.

[6] Programme expenditure only—does not include manpower and running costs.

All figures have been converted using the implied GDP factor cost deflator.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect of the recent increase in VAT on manufacturers and wholesalers of pre-price-marked goods currently in stock and unsold before the price increase takes effect.

Mr. Leigh: Traders selling to the consumer must ensure that he is not misled as to the price at which they are offering goods for sale. If a retailer decides to recover the increase in the rate of VAT in respect of pre-price marked goods, he will have to ensure that the consumer is not misled as to their price. It would be for the retailer and the manufacturer or wholesaler to agree on whom the burden of any necessary relabelling should fall.

Estate Agents

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will implement the proposals announced last year to strengthen the law governing the regulation of estate agents.

Mr. Leigh: I am today laying orders and regulations under the Estate Agents Act 1979 to improve standards in the conduct of estate agency. I am convinced that these measures will deal effectively with malpractices by estate agents and significantly improve consumer protection. The Estate Agents (Specified Offences) Order will come into effect on 13 May and the Estate Agents (Undesirable practices) Order and the Estate Agents (Provision of Information) Regulations will come into force on 29 July.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat posed to British forces involved in Operation Granby from Iraqi possession of French-made technology.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Though it is not the practice to release information on threat assessments, potential and actual threats to the security of Her Majesty's armed forces are kept under constant review.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of depleted uranium shells and bullets were fired by allied forces in the Gulf war; and what steps have been taken to clean up the desert areas where such radioactive ammunition was used.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A small proportion of the ammunition used by British forces during the conflict in the Gulf contained depleted uranium. The use of such material by other allied forces is a matter for the countries concerned. The uranium 235 content of these rounds is less than that which occurs naturally, and any residual hazard to health from such rounds would be minimal.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), of 19 March, *Official Report*, column 153, he will set out the methodology used to calculate the disaggregated breakdown of the £1·75 billion additional costs incurred by the United Kingdom through participation in military activities in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The figure of about £1·75 billion comprises two elements: the value of major equipments lost and munitions consumed in the conflict and in associated training (on present estimates totalling about £450 million); and the additional costs of preparing for and participating in the conflict (assessed at about £1,300 million). The latter element includes some £700 million for new equipment and modifications; £200 million for sea and air transport; and £400 million for other operating costs both in and out of theatre. Costs yet to be incurred or assessed will include the recovery, maintenance and repair of equipment, the replacement of stores, the bringing of equipment back to common modification standards, and the consequential effects of the conflict on the defence programme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the United Kingdom service men killed in friendly fire action in the Gulf war were hit by depleted uranium radioactive bullets fired by United States forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The investigations into the incidents in which British service men were killed or injured by friendly fire are not yet complete.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 March, column *90*, which British defence companies sent staff to the Gulf region in support of Operation Granby; what type of staff were sent; and how many staff each company sent.

Mr. Alan Clarke: These details are a matter for the companies concerned.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect Operation Granby will have on planning the level of logistical support for BAOR units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work is continuing to determine the size and shape of the Army's logistic support under "Options for Change", and account will be taken of any Granby lessons learned in this area.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect Operation Granby had on the level of maintenance available to those armoured units that remained in Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Operation Granby has had an effect on maintenance and spares support for vehicles belonging to units in Germany. I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on 28 November 1990 at column *446*.

Training Courses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his practice to answer questions on the numbers of students from specific foreign countries on his departmental training courses.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our normal practice is not to disclose details of military training provided for Foreign and Commonwealth countries as these are generally confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Government concerned. There are no plans to change this.

Nuclear Facility (Israel)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the Iraqi Scud missile attacks on the Israeli nuclear facility at Dimona.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Iraq claimed on 17 February that during the previous evening it had fired three Scud missiles towards Dimona in Israel and one missile against Haifa. We have no information that the Scud attacks against Israel that night caused any casualties or damage.

Embassy, Baghdad

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to post a military attaché to the British embassy in Baghdad.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to reply. He will answer shortly.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* all representations his Department has received in each year, respectively, since 1987 from *(a)* Committees of Parliament, *(b)* non-governmental organisations, *(c)* associations of elected authorities and *(d)* individuals on the subject of the disposal of nuclear submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence has received a number of representations on the subject of the disposal of nuclear submarines and related issues since 1987. These have been from a range of individuals and organisations.

Aeroplane Crash

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the national identity of the pilots killed in each aeroplane crash during training over the area of the present constituency of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There has been one fatal military aircraft accident in the present constituency of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale since 1979. The accident involved a United States air force F111 aircraft, and occurred near Lauder on 28 July 1987. The pilot was American.

"Options for Change"

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if there will be any additional expenditure *(a)* as a total and *(b)* per head on retraining and resettling service personnel staff who are made redundant as a consequence of "Options for Change";

(2) whether there will be any changes in the length or scope of pre-release training offered to his Department's staff in the light of "Options for Change";

(3) whether there will be any additional expenditure *(a)* as a total and *(b)* per head on retraining and resettling civilian support staff who are made redundant as a consequence of "Options for Change";

(4) whether there will be any increase in the number of personnel attached to the Tri-Service Resettlement Organisation in the light of "Options for Change."

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are reviewing the arrangements for the resettlement of service personnel in the light of changing circumstances. As far as civilian staff are concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the replies I and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement gave to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on, respectively, 12 June 1990, at columns *142-43* and 25 July 1990, at column *297*.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what redundancy payments service personnel and civilian support staff who are made redundant as a consequence of "Options for Change" will receive;

(2) what measures he intends to take to cope with reductions in service personnel and civilian support staff in the light of "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the House on 19 March at column 149, final decisions on the size and shape of the armed forces have yet to be taken. These decisions will also affect the nature of reductions among civilian support staff.

The expected reductions in both service personnel and civilian staff will be achieved largely by natural wastage. The nature of any redundancy is still under consideration, as are the payments redundant personnel would receive.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information has been provided to the defence industry regarding the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Alan Clark: Ministers and officials in the Department have regular contacts with representatives of the defence industry and have discussed a number of issues related to "Options for Change".

RAF Leuchars

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any proposals to discontinue search and rescue operations at RAF Leuchars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The provision of military search and rescue cover around the United Kingdom is one of many areas of defence activity currently being reviewed under "Options for Change". It is too early to say whether this will have any implications for search and rescue operations at RAF Leuchars.

RAF Bases, Lincolnshire

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of each of the RAF bases in Lincolnshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement announced on 28 February last year, at column 290, the withdrawal of Bloodhound from RAF North Coates, which will be closed, and RAF Barkston Heath, which will be retained as a relief landing ground for RAF Cranwell. At present we are examining the scope for rationalising a range of defence support activities, and this may well affect other RAF bases in Lincolnshire, but no decisions have yet been taken.

South Atlantic Fund

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was donated to the South Atlantic fund; how much has been given to members of the South Atlantic forces; and what has happened to surplus money in the fund.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am unable to provide the information requested. These are matters for the trustees of the fund.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ensure that surpluses from the South Atlantic fund and the Gulf Trust are used specifically for members of the forces injured in other conflicts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has no power to make directions for the disbursement of surpluses from the South Atlantic fund or the Gulf Trust.

Taylorplan Services Ltd.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 7 March, *Official Report*, columns 293-94, if he will list the 20 Ministry of Defence contracts awarded to Taylorplan Services Ltd., together with the total value of each contract; and if he will explain the circumstances in which the two contracts which are no longer current were ended.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to publish detailed lists of contracts awarded to individual companies. The two contracts which are no longer current both expired on the completion of the agreed contract periods.

Walter Somers Ltd.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *444*, whether the Ministry of Defence metallurgical expert was aware of the involvement of Dr. Gerard Bull in the proposed export of steel tubes to Iraq at the time of his two conversations with Walter Somers Ltd.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

United Nations

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what involvement service personnel or other Ministry of Defence personnel have had in discussions at the United Nations in New York in the last two years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom representative at the regular meetings of the United Nations military staff committee is a serving officer. A British Army major was attached to the United Nations field operations division in New York in the period between January 1989 and November 1990 to advise on logistic and other support aspects of peacekeeping and monitoring operations primarily, though not wholly, in connection with United Nations Transition Assistance Group Namibia. Military officers and officials from the Ministry of Defence have also visited the United Nations, particularly in connection with Namibia.

Iraq

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British companies have supplied him with information regarding the export of British non-lethal defence equipment to Iraq in the last eight months.

Mr. Alan Clark: The supply of any such information would be treated in the strictest confidence.

Export Controls

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the work of the co-ordinating committee for multilateral export controls has altered as a result of the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Alan Clark: The committee's work, which relates to strategic exports to the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China, has been unaffected by events in the Gulf.

Naval Bases

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* NATO, *(b)* the Allied Commander, Channel, *(c)* the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic and *(d)* the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe on the future of naval bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None, although the NATO authorities are fully aware that we aim to achieve substantial savings in all areas of defence support.

Guardsman Steven Kincaid

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department expects to finalise the necessary arrangements for the release of Guardsman Steven Kincaid from the Irish Guards.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Arrangements are currently being finalised.

BFPO 3000

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the BFPO 3000 appeal.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The BFPO appeal has proved enormously successful. The public responded with typical generosity, and well over 100 tonnes of mail and parcels have been sent out to troops serving in the Gulf. More than half our troops have already returned from the Gulf, and there is less of a requirement to maintain the type of support which BFPO 3000 provided. The appeal is therefore being closed. Any residual items will, where appropriate, continue to be sent to the Gulf, or will be redirected to service personnel serving in other locations, including Northern Ireland. I would like to record the Government's appreciation of the magnificent way the country showed its support for our armed forces throughout the Gulf conflict.

RAF Maintenance Group, Brampton

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Royal Air Force support command maintenance group at Brampton.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The maintenance group within RAF support command will become a defence support agency of the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1991. The group comprises a headquarters at RAF Brampton and 12 RAF stations, together with a number of aerosystems, supply and signals units established at those stations and elsewhere within RAF support and strike commands. It is currently manned by some 7,780 RAF personnel and 5,830 civilians, and for financial year 1991-92 has a projected operating budget of £288 million and a full cost budget of £643 million.

The role of the maintenance group is to provide aerosystems and signals engineering, warehousing and transportation, and communication services to the Royal Air Force. The high professional standards which have characterised the group's support for the RAF will be maintained, and agency status will provide the chief executive with new opportunities to improve the efficiency and value for money of his organisation. The Air Officer Commanding Maintenance Units, Air Vice Marshal D. G. Campbell, has been appointed the agency's chief executive.

The chief executive has been set the following key targets for the first year of operation of the agency:

- To achieve at least 95 per cent. of specified tasks for 1991-92, representing approximately 75 per cent. of group activity, to standard and on time, and to develop similar measures of programme delivery to cover additional MG tasks by 1 April 1992;
- To reduce the proportion, in value terms, of the total annual throughput of avionic and mechanical components tied up in work by 10 per cent. in 1991-92, and to develop a general costing system for equipment in work by 1 April 1992;
- To perform all operational support tasks to RAF or NATO standards, as appropriate;
- To keep within agreed budget;
- To improve overall efficiency by saving the equivalent of 1·5 per cent. of cash costs in FY 1991-92;
- To determine for future years appropriate measures and targets for efficiency improvement, including units cost targets, by 1 April 1992;

In light of Options and PROSPECT studies, to complete planning for group estate and asset rationalisation, including investment appraisal, by 1 October 1992;

To develop a consistent approach to defining units of output by 1 April 1992;

To introduce a commercial costing system for all major tasks by 1 October 1992.

To complete and validate all capital asset registers, and to develop performance indicators for asset utilisation, by 1 April 1992;

To develop a total quality management (TQM) approach designed to bring out continuous improvement in quality, including increased attention to the balance of quality and cost and to customer satisfaction.

Territorial Army

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence up to what per cent. of its approved establishment the Territorial Army is by *(a)* TAVRA region and *(b)* Arm/Corp.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* The information requested, as at 31 December 1990, is as follows:

(a) By TAVRA region (independent units only)[1]

TAVRA Region	*Per cent. recruited*
Northern Ireland	89·0
Highland	87·7
Lowland	72·2
North of England	75·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	76·4
East Midlands	98·8
East Anglia	126·1
Greater London	68·7
South East	81·0
Eastern Wessex	103·1
Western Wessex	72·4
Wales	73·0
West Midlands	81·9
North West and Isle of Man	91·5

[1] TAVRAS are only responsible for Independent Units. Specialist Units are recruited nationwide.

(b) by Arm Corps

Arm Corps	*Per cent. recruited*
RAC	80·1
RA	84·1
RE	78·4
RE PCS	76·8
R Signals	78·5
INF	82·4
AAC	79·5
RACHD	89·2
RCT	73·6
RAMC	70·0
RAOC	73·3
REME	79·6
RMP	80·5
RAPC	74·5
RAVC	72·5
RPC	80·4
UOTC	122·7
HSF	65·8

ENERGY

Renewable Energy

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his policy for the development of renewable energy.

Mr. Moynihan: Renewable energy sources offer both increased diversity of supply and environmental benefits in terms of reduced gaseous emissions. In particular, renewable energy sources can play a part in reducing Britain's emissions of greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide and methane.

The Government's policy set out in Department of Energy paper 55, "Renewable Energy in the United Kingdom—The Way Forward", is to encourage the development of renewable energy sources wherever they have prospects of being both economically competitive and acceptable in terms of the impact on the environment. This policy is in line with the approach of the European Community. The government's White Paper "This Common Inheritance" published in September 1990, said that the Government would work towards 1,000 MW of electricity generating capacity from renewable sources by the year 2005. This will contribute towards achieving the United Kingdom's target of returning carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2005.

The Government introduced the non-fossil fuel obligation in the Electricity Act 1989, which empowers the Secretary of State for Energy to require the regional electricity companies to contract for specified minimum electricity generating capacity from renewable energy sources so as to encourage the exploitation of the country's renewable energy resources. Planning applications for projects which relate to orders under the 1989 Act are in pursuit of this policy. The first order, laid in 1990, resulted in 170 MW being contracted, and a further order is proposed in 1991 giving projects the opportunity to proceed as soon as possible.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning set out some planning guidance on renewable energy for local authorities in answer to a parliamentary question today. Officials in the Departments of Energy and of the Environment and the Welsh Office are preparing a planning policy guidance note on this subject.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list by institution and amount the United Kingdom projects that have to date secured funds from the EC THERMIE programme on renewable energy technologies.

Mr. Moynihan: Three United Kingdom projects relating to renewable energy technologies were successful in the first call under the THERMIE programme and contracts are now being negotiated.

Project	*Estimated total cost (£)*	*Maximum grant from the Commission (£)*
Vacu-Lug Traction Tyres Ltd.	2,000,000	700,000
Polytechnic of North London	600,000	240,000
National Engineering Laboratory	420,000	170,000

The projects relate, respectively, to environmentally acceptable energy and materials from scrap tyres;

demonstrating energy savings in traditional buildings using unconventional planning and daylighting design; and wind-powered desalination by reverse osmosis on a commercial scale.

Magnox Spent Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out the arrangements agreed *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* in regard to multilateral treaties to which the United Kingdom is a party, between the United Kingdom and (i) Italy and (ii) Japan, respectively, to apply safeguards to Magnox nuclear fuel sent for reprocessing at Sellafield; and in each case what was the date of the first receipt of spent fuel in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following agreements are in force:

(i) INFCIRC 125—between the United Kingdom, Japan and the IAEA;
(ii) INFCIRC 175—between the United Kingdom and the IAEA;
(iii) INFCIRC 263—between the United Kingdom, the IAEA and the European Atomic Energy Community.

In addition, all civil nuclear material, including that received for reprocessing from Italy and Japan, is subject to Euratom safeguards under the treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community of 1957.

The first receipt of spent fuel from (i) Italy, took place in January 1966; and (ii) Japan took place in September 1969.

CIVIL SERVICE

Recruitment Executive Agency

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made towards the creation of an executive agency within his Department to carry out recruitment and related functions.

Mr. Renton: I am pleased to announce that the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency (RAS) will be launched on 1 April 1991 to coincide with the wider changes in civil service recruitment that I referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on 26 March at columns *364-65*. It will be the third executive agency to be established in my Department.

The RAS is being created primarily to take over the executive recruitment functions currently performed by the Civil Service Commission. It will charge for all its services; and its customers—mainly Government Departments, other executive agencies and the civil service commissioners—will be free to recruit for themselves or to go elsewhere if they believe that they will obtain better value for money.

Agency status, together with a range of additional managerial freedoms and flexibilities, will enable the RAS to compete effectively for business with other providers in the public and private sectors. I have set demanding targets in the areas of financial performance, operational efficiency and quality of service. These include recovery of full costs; a productivity increase of 6·8 per cent. in the first year; and achievement of an overall customer satisfaction level of at least 85 per cent.

A copy of the framework document will be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Rating System

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing (i) for each of the years 1970-71 to 1991-92 an analysis by class of authority of non-domestic rateable values, average poundages, actual payments, and uncollected non-domestic rate-revenue and (ii) for each of the years 1970-71 to 1988-89 by class of authority of domestic rateable values, gross rates, rates net of rebates, and uncollected domestic rate revenue.

Mr. Lang: Figures by class of authority are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the table gives figures that are readily available for all authorities. The split of rates income between the domestic and non-domestic sectors has been estimated pro rata to rateable values. Data on uncollected rate revenue are not available centrally.

Year	*Non-domestic rateable values* £ million	*Average poundage* pence	*Gross non-domestic rates income* £ million	*Domestic rateable values* £ million	*Gross domestic rates income* £ million	*Nett domestic rates income* £ million
1970-71	84	131·5	108	76	99	n/a
1971-72	142	86·0	120	142	119	102
1972-73	146	88·0	127	145	126	107
1973-74	151	96·0	144	149	141	117
1974-75	157	111·0	170	152	164	128
1975-76	163	142·0	222	155	208	160
1976-77	168	162·0	261	158	241	101
1977-78	175	183·0	304	162	272	205
1978-79	770	54·0	386	447	220	188
1979-80	801	62·0	460	464	256	217
1980-81	619	81·0	625	462	346	299
1981-82	327	108·5	842	469	475	408
1982-83	822	122·6	927	476	539	449
1983-84	839	124·9	944	482	537	389
1984-85	336	129·4	982	489	569	407
1985-86	1,813	64·9	1,027	1,309	739	441
1986-87	1,663	67·4	1,124	1,327	794	501
1987-88	1,878	75·0	1,257	1,844	996	592
1988-89	1,862	78·7	1,889	1,358	960	694
1989-90	1,824	75·6	1,221	—	—	—

Year	Non-domestic rateable values £ million	Average poundage pence	Gross non-domestic rates income £ million	Domestic rateable values £ million	Gross domestic rates income £ million	Net domestic rates income £ million
1990-91	2,586	67·3	[1]1,188	—	—	—
1991-92	n/a	58·1	[2]1,335	—	—	—

n/a Not available.
[1] Provisional.
[2] Estimated.
The figures for gross domestic rates income include rebate grants and the domestic element of rate support grant. The figures for net domestic rates income exclude those components.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish tables comparable to tables 1 to 3 and additional analyses 1 to 3 of "A Commentary on the Scotland Programme: Public Expenditure to 1992-93" consistent with the expenditure plans in Cm. 1515.

Mr. Lang: Tables 1 to 3 and additional analyses 1 and 2 comparable to the tables in a "Commentary on the Scotland Programme: Public Expenditure to 1992-93" consistent with the expenditure plans in Cm. 1515 are as follows.

Additional analyses table 3 is not readily available and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as it is.

Central Government Expenditure

£ million

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Current						
Agriculture, fisheries and food	151	160	180	196	210	220
Industry, energy, trade and employment	7	27	61	317	340	340
Tourism	7	8	9	9	10	10
Transport	26	32	34	34	30	30
Housing	113	138	131	125	140	140
Other environmental services	42	42	49	63	70	70
Law, order and protective services	199	216	254	274	290	310
Education	255	282	336	399	430	440
Arts and libraries	17	18	20	25	30	30
Health	2,380	2,568	2,815	3,082	3,250	3,370
Social work	8	14	16	28	30	30
Other public services	109	118	132	149	160	160
Total Current	3,314	3,624	4,037	4,701	4,980	5,160
Capital						
Agriculture, fisheries and food	31	35	44	52	50	50
Industry, energy, trade and employment	232	196	194	211	190	180
Tourism	3	3	4	4	—	—
Transport	114	144	180	182	190	200
Housing	140	152	208	271	220	240
Other environmental services	18	27	35	32	20	20
Law, order and protective services	20	31	33	36	30	30
Education	17	19	42	54	60	70
Arts and libraries	6	7	12	12	20	30
Health	120	152	175	200	200	210
Social work	—	—	1	1	—	—
Other public services	5	5	7	10	10	10
Total Capital	708	773	933	1,066	1,020	1,040
Total						
Agriculture, fisheries and food	182	196	224	248	260	270
Industry, energy, trade and employment	239	223	255	527	530	520
Tourism	10	11	12	13	10	10
Transport	141	176	215	217	230	230
Housing	253	290	338	396	370	380
Other environmental services	60	69	84	96	90	90
Law, order and protective services	219	247	288	310	320	340
Education	272	301	378	453	490	510
Arts and libraries	23	25	32	38	50	50
Health	2,501	2,721	2,990	3,283	3,450	3,570
Social work	9	14	16	28	30	30
Other public services	115	124	139	159	170	180
Total Central Government	4,022	4,397	4,970	5,767	5,990	6,200

Expenditure subject to cash limit control 1991-92

£ million

	Programme total	Cash limits	Per cent.
Agriculture, fisheries and food	249	104	42
Industry, energy trade and employment	527	435	83
Tourism	13	12	92
Transport	381	381	100
Housing[1]	714	688	96
Other environmental services	364	295	81
Law, order and protective services	496	293	59
Education	553	354	64
Arts and libraries	41	41	100
Health	3,283	2,664	81
Social Work	56	56	100
Other public services	142	142	100
Associated Departments	88	88	100
Nationalised Industries	49	0	0
Local authority	4,096	2,707	66
Total	11,052	8,260	75

[1] Excludes £132 million in respect of Scottish Homes' NLF repayments which is a technical adjustment and does not represent part of Scottish Homes' usable programme expenditure—ref 4.31 of Departmental Report (Cm 1515).

Expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Agriculture and Fisheries Department	202	177	170	182	197	226	249	260	270
Industry Department (excluding Tourism)	284	327	245	240	224	254	527	540	520
Tourism	9	9	9	10	11	12	13	10	10
Transport	301	285	284	277	342	385	381	390	400
Housing	518	558	648	584	609	660	714	700	740
Other Environmental Services	205	215	239	264	289	316	364	410	440
Law, Order and Protective Services	302	330	370	415	472	524	567	580	610
Education	303	326	339	368	390	462	553	590	610
Arts and Libraries	22	26	26	28	29	35	41	50	50
Health	1,954	2,071	2,248	2,501	2,721	2,990	3,283	3,450	3,570
Social Work	33	25	27	31	37	40	56	60	60
Other Public Services	100	105	111	117	126	141	159	165	176
Central Government Grants:									
Revenue Support Grant	—	—	—	—	2,244	2,469	2,651	4,130	4,240
Rate Support Grant	1,657	1,713	1,708	2,007	102	—	—	—	—
Community Charge Transitional Relief	—	—	—	—	—	44	25	50	30
Rate Rebates	39	36	32	27	25	32	31	—	—
Non-Domestic Rates	1,023	1,108	1,238	1,290	1,219	1,189	1,389		
Nationalised Industries External Financing Limits	232	235	137	127	−103	−89	49	50	10
TOTAL	7,167	7,513	7,805	8,458	8,919	9,725	11,052	11,460	11,780

Expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility in real terms

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Agriculture, fisheries and food	251	213	194	194	197	209	218	220	220
Industry, energy trade and employment	353	394	280	255	224	235	460	450	420
Tourism	11	11	10	11	11	11	11	10	10
Transport	374	343	324	295	342	356	333	330	320
Housing	644	672	740	621	609	611	624	580	600
Other environmental services	255	259	273	281	289	293	318	340	350
Law, order and protective services	375	397	422	441	472	485	495	480	490
Education	377	392	387	391	390	428	483	490	490
Arts and libraries	27	31	30	30	29	32	36	40	40
Health	2,429	2,493	2,566	2,660	2,721	2,769	2,868	2,880	2,880
Social Work	41	30	31	33	37	37	49	50	50
Other public services	124	126	127	124	126	131	139	140	140
Local authority									
Revenue support grant	—	—	—	—	2,244	2,311	2,316	3,440	3,420
Rate support grant	2,060	2,062	1,949	2,135	102	—	—	—	—
CCTR	—	—	—	—	—	41	22	40	20
Rate rebates	48	43	37	29	25	30	27	—	—
Non-domestic rates	1,272	1,334	1,413	1,372	219	1,101	1,213	—	—
National Insurance EFL	288	283	156	135	−103	−81	43	40	10
Total	8,932	9,082	8,938	9,008	8,934	8,998	9,654	9,560	9,460

Public expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility by spending sector, economic category and in total

	1986-87 £ million	1987-88 £ million	1988-89 £ million	1989-90 £ million	1990-91 £ million	1991-92 £ million	1992-93 £ millio	1993-94 £ million
CURRENT EXPENDITURE								
Pay and related costs	141	157	170	187	211	238	260	280
General administrative expenses	32	33	40	41	47	63	60	70
Other pay and pension costs	1,165	1,290	1,422	1,548	1,652	1,781	1,830	1,880
Grants to the private sector	253	268	293	348	380	453	490	500
Other expenditure on goods and services	965	1,022	1,154	1,205	1,402	1,582	1,710	1,780
Subsidies	229	228	245	303	354	594	640	670
Current grants to local authorities	3,029	3,160	3,528	3,815	4,021	4,396	4,510	4,620
TOTAL	5,815	6,157	6,851	7,448	8,066	9,107	9,500	9,790
CAPITAL EXPENDITURE								
Capital grants	1,182	1,193	1,213	1,267	1,301	1,533	1,410	1,440
Expenditure on capital assets	258	272	289	362	441	473	490	510
Net lending	−64	334	326	1,014	−120	−82	70	30
Borrowing by public corporations	302	−167	−220	−1,171	37	20	—	—
TOTAL	1,678	1,633	1,607	1,472	1,659	1,944	1,960	1,980
GRAND TOTAL	7,494	7,789	8,458	8,919	9,725	11,052	11,460	11,780
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT								
Current								
Pay and related costs	141	157	170	187	211	238	260	280
General administrative expenses	32	33	40	41	47	63	60	70
Other pay and pension costs	1,165	1,290	1,422	1,548	1,652	1,781	1,830	1,880
Grants to the private sector	253	268	293	348	380	453	490	500
Other expenditure on goods and services	965	1,022	1,154	1,205	1,402	1,582	1,710	1,780
Subsidies	132	134	161	176	194	200	210	230
Capital								
Capital grants	380	294	317	169	194	183	180	170
Expenditure on capital assets	228	248	269	347	414	452	470	490
Net lending	5	6	1	1	19	34	40	50
TOTAL	3,300	3,451	3,827	4,023	4,512	4,987	5,250	5,440
TRANSFERS FROM CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES								
Current grants to local authorities	3,029	3,160	3,528	3,815	4,021	4,396	4,510	4,620
Capital grants to local authorities	26	17	20	38	38	61	70	80
Net capital allocations	680	782	761	772	785	780	840	870
TOTAL	3,735	3,959	4,309	4,625	4,843	5,236	5,420	5,570

£ million

	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Public corporations								
Current								
Subsidies	87	84	75	119	151	384	410	430
Capital								
Capital grants	96	99	114	288	285	509	320	320
Expenditure on capital assets	31	24	20	14	27	21	20	20
Net lending	9	35	−13	−46	−5	−134	−10	−10
Total	223	242	196	374	457	780	740	760
Nationalised industries								
Current								
Subsidies	10	10	9	9	9	10	10	10
Capital								
Net lending	−78	294	338	1,059	−133	18	30	−10
Borrowing by public corporations	303	−167	−220	−1,171	37	20	—	—
Total	235	137	127	−103	−88	49	50	10

The figures for the year 1985-86 are consistent with those in "A Commentary on the Scotland Programme: Public Expenditure to 1992-93".

Training

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the ability of Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise councils of Scotland to provide special needs training for those who require it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Since the beginning of 1991, I have received 25 representations which, among other issues, express concern about the ability of Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies to provide special needs training for those who require it. Local enterprise companies were required to make adequate provision for people with special needs in their business plans; and the scrutiny of these business plans by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise necessarily included assessment of how well the local enterprise companies' proposals met these needs. Furthermore, one of the criteria by which local enterprise companies are to be judged is their success in catering for special training needs. There is no reason to doubt that Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and local enterprise companies are taking their responsibilities for people with special needs seriously and will deliver appropriate training provision.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate the Scottish Office has made for the share of the youth training budget in the Borders for 1991-92 which is to come from private sources; and if he will make it his policy that if the sum is not forthcoming he will make up any shortfall.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office has no involvement in the allocation of resources by Scottish Enterprise to individual local enterprise companies. These decisions, and any estimates on which they are based, are matters for Scottish Enterprise.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why rate rebates appears as a line without expenditure under non-voted central Government grants to local authorities in table 12.1 of Cm. 1515.

Mr. Lang: This line is for money refunded to the Scottish Office by local authorities that have overclaimed in respect of rate rebate grants in earlier years. The information in this line should, however, accord with that given in the main table on page 2 and I am grateful to the hon. Member for drawing this omission to my attention.

House Valuation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what method the district valuer in Scotland intends to use to value the purchase price of tenanted housing in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter for individual district valuers to determine. I understand that valuations are based and will continue to be based on an analysis of available sales evidence. This is consistent with the approach used in sales of other properties in which district valuers are involved.

Roads

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the outcome of the public local inquiry held in February 1990, following a compulsory purchase order submitted in 1989 to enable the Highlands regional council to acquire land for the north service road, Fort William.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I expect a decision on the compulsory purchase order made by Highland regional council to acquire land for the north service road, Fort William, and which was the subject of a public local inquiry in February and March 1990, to be announced by the end of April.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the countries currently negotiating with AEA Fuel Services to reprocess or store research reactor irradiated fuel at Dounreay;

(2) if he will list the countries that have contracts with AEA Fuel Services or the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency to reprocess or store research reactor irradiated fuel at Dounreay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) is currently in discussion with a number of overseas customers about possible contracts to store or reprocess spent research reactor fuel at Dounreay. Until these negotiations have been concluded, however, information on the countries involved is commercially confidential.

The UKAEA has confirmed contracts for storage or reprocessing with customers in Germany. The Government have specified that all reprocessing contracts entered into by the UKAEA with overseas customers must contain options for the return of waste and that these options should be exercised.

Dounreay

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent developments have taken place at the Atomic Energy Development Establishment at Dounreay to reduce the levels of radioactive waste discharged to the sea.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Significant process modifications were carried out during the period 1978-83, including the commissioning of an additional plant to reduce the activity in the aqueous discharges from nuclear fuel reprocessing. Since that time further improvements have been achieved by operational means.

Because reprocessing requirements differ from year to year and the plants are not run continuously, discharges will vary from one period to another. They have consistently been well below the authorised limits. A revised liquid waste authorisation with reduced limits was issued in 1989.

Parking Offences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parking tickets were received and paid by his Department in each year since 1988 in respect of official vehicles.

Mr. Lang: The responsibility for parking fines incurred by official vehicles was until April 1990 the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Since that date 15 fines totalling £240 are attributed to vehicles of my Department.

Health Boards

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the revenue *(b)* the capital and *(c)* the total allocation for Lothian health board for 1991-92 and each of the last five financial years in (i) cash terms, (ii) 1986-87 prices and (iii) 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Revenue Allocation			*Capital Allocation*			*Total Allocation*		
	Cash	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*	*Cash*	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*	*Cash*	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*
1986-87	234·034	234·034	303·594	15·973	15·973	20·721	250·007	250·007	324·312
1987-88	253·249	240·423	311·883	18·776	17·825	23·123	272·025	258·248	335·006
1988-89	283·328	250·336	324·741	18·600	16·434	21·319	301·928	266·770	346·060
1989-90	300·502	249·603	323·791	29·819	24·768	32·130	330·321	274·371	355·921
1990-91	333·738	257·271	333·738	13·324	10·271	13·324	347·027	267·515	347·027
1991-92	358·804	258·500	335·332	21·821	15·721	20·394	380·625	274·221	355·726

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the revenue, *(b)* the capital and *(c)* the total allocation for Scottish health boards for 1991-92 and each of the last five financial years in (i) cash terms, (ii) 1986-87 prices and (iii) 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Revenue Allocation			*Capital Allocation*			*Total Allocation*		
	Cash	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*	*Cash*	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*	*Cash*	*At 1986-87 prices*	*At 1990-91 prices*
1986-87	1,454·658	1,454·658	1,887·017	97·455	97·455	126·421	1,552·113	1,552·113	2,013·438
1987-88	1,577·360	1,497·476	1,942·562	105·955	100·589	130·486	1,683·315	1,598·065	2,073·048
1988-89	1,765·424	1,559·847	2,023·470	112·374	99·288	128·799	1,877·798	1,659·135	2,152·270
1989-90	1,890·162	1,570·006	2,036·650	143·399	119·110	154·512	2,033·561	1,689·116	2,191·162
1990-91	2,095·331	1,615·243	2,095·331	141·372	108·980	141·372	2,236·703	1,724·223	2,236·703
1991-92	2,259·131	1,686·373	2,111·346	198·403	142·939	185·424	2,457·534	1,770·528	2,296·771

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the revenue, *(b)* the capital and *(c)* the total expenditure by Lothian health board in each of the last five financial years in (i) cash terms, (ii) 1986-87 prices and (iii) 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year	*£,000s Revenue Expenditure*			*£,000s Capital Expenditure*			*£,000s Total*		
	Cash Terms	*1986-87 Prices*	*1990-91 Prices*	*Cash Terms*	*1986-87 Prices*	*1990-91 Prices*	*Cash Terms*	*1986-87 Prices*	*1990-91 Prices*
1985-86	274,584	284,100	368,541	19,678	20,360	26,411	294,262	304,460	394,952
1986-87	295,708	295,708	383,600	16,212	16,212	21,031	311,920	311,920	404,630
1987-88	326,063	309,550	401,556	16,977	16,117	20,907	343,040	325,667	422,463
1988-89	358,201	316,490	410,559	18,881	16,682	21,641	377,082	333,172	432,199
1989-90	393,526	326,871	424,025	32,518	27,010	35,039	426,045	353,881	459,063

Notes:

1. These figures include non-cash limited family practitioners services expenditure.
2. Expenditure figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the revenue, *(b)* the capital and *(c)* the total expenditure by Scottish health boards in each of the last five years in (i) cash terms, (ii) 1986-87 prices and (iii) 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

£'000s

Year	Revenue expenditure			Capital expenditure			Total		
	Cash terms	1986-87 prices	1990-91 prices	Cash terms	1986-87 prices	1990-91 prices	Cash terms	1986-87 prices	1990-91 prices
1985-86	1,739,554	1,799,836	2,334,790	118,206	122,303	158,654	1,857,761	1,922,139	2,493,444
1986-87	1,866,616	1,866,616	2,421,419	103,567	103,567	134,350	1,970,183	1,970,183	2,555,769
1987-88	1,889,936	1,794,222	2,327,507	266,270	252,785	327,918	2,156,206	2,047,007	2,655,426
1988-89	2,281,568	2,015,888	2,615,057	113,928	100,662	130,581	2,395,496	2,116,549	2,745,638
1989-90	2,453,199	2,037,676	2,643,322	150,702	125,176	162,382	2,603,901	2,162,852	2,805,703

Notes:

1. These figures include non-cash limited family practitioners services expenditure.
2. Expenditure figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *616-17*, whether he will exhume the bodies of the BSE confirmed cattle that were buried in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No.

Hospitals

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals have applied to opt out of health board contol in each of the Scottish health board areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Expressions of interest have been received on behalf of seven Units. These are the South Ayrshire unit (Ayrshire and Arran health board), Foresterhill and West Grampian (Grampian health board), Forfar hospitals (Tayside health board), the Victoria infirmary and associated hospitals (Greater Glasgow health board), the Royal Scottish national hospital (Forth Valley health board) and the Princess Margaret Rose hospital (Lothian health board). Of these Foresterhill and South Ayrshire have indicated that they intend to bring forward an application in the near future.

Education and Business Partnerships

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about support for partnerships between education and business in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I attach high priority to establishing effective links between the worlds of education and business. Each has a vital role in the future well-being of our country and it is essential that they work closely together. Much valuable work is already going on in this field but it is recognised by many of those involved that the effectiveness of these efforts could be improved.

Proposals to promote and develop education-business link activities feature prominently in the business plans submitted by the local enterprise companies and I very much welcome this. In order to further assist this work and ensure that it attracts the priority which I believe it requires, additional financial support is being made available specifically to encourage the development of education-business partnerships.

This funding will be provided to local enterprise companies through Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support a variety of aspects of liaison between business and education, including providing placements with business for pupils and teachers, business visits to schools and a wide range of innovative activities which will bring benefits to both education and business.

The LEC-promoted partnerships will be expected to raise funding from other sources so that maximum benefit can be gained from public support.

I am confident that local enterprise companies, education authorities and organisations already involved in this area will work closely together to get these partnership arrangements under way to the benefit of the whole community and I am now inviting education authorities and other interested parties to approach their LECs to discuss how these proposals can best be taken forward.

School Examinations

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to improve the quality of spelling, grammar and punctuation in Scottish school examinations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The ability to communicate clearly in writing is a fundamental skill which should be fostered in all school work and examinations. Good grammar and punctuation and correct spelling are essential to clear communication. Currently a variety of practices is operated by the Scottish Examination Board in its examinations in relation to these elements. The board has been asked to review these practices and it has this in hand. Meanwhile examiners will no doubt take account of spelling, grammar and punctuation in accordance with the arrangements that currently apply to each subject.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any further changes to the cash limits for 1990-91 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Yes, I intend to change one of the cash limits within my responsibility as follows.

The cash limit for class XV, vote 15, education, arts, libraries and social work, Scotland will be reduced by £1,032,000 from £233,075,000 to £232,043,000. This represents the further cash limit reductions foreshadowed in my answer to the hon. Member for Tayside, North on 1 February at columns *685-86* and will offset the amounts of £617,000 required to meet increased expenditure in respect of the St. Helena ship and £415,000 in respect of the Department of the Registers of Scotland.

Bone Marrow Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make additional facilities available to Greater Glasgow health board for bone marrow transplants at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1990]:* Central funding for this service has been assured until April 1991. Thereafter the revenue allocated to Greater Glasgow health board will provide the resources necessary to treat its own bone marrow transplant patients; and the board will be fully compensated during the course of the year for the costs to it of treating any bone marrow transplant patients referred by other boards.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of patients on the waiting list for bone marrow transplants at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1990]:* At the end of 1990 the waiting list for patients for bone marrow transplants at Glasgow royal infirmary was 31.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients in the last year have died while awaiting bone marrow transplantation at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1990]:* During 1990, a total of seven patients died while awaiting bone marrow transplantation at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Chemical Incinerators

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he offers to local authorities concerning the granting of planning permission for the construction of chemical incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 26 March 1991]:* No specific advice is given to local authorities concerning the granting of planning permission for the construction of chemical incinerators. General advice and guidance on handling planning applications and other planning matters is contained in a number of circulars issued by the Scottish Office.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 188**

SESSION 1990–91

18th March—28th March 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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